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Planning and developing school-based community supports for refugee children

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Planning and Developing School-based Community Supports for Refugee Children

by

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THESIS

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Abstract

Despite the growing numbers of refugee families settling in Canada, there is little or no documentation on how to support the healing process of refugee children. The purpose of this study was to learn about planning and developing school-based community supports for these children by examining and documenting several school-based community initiatives in Kitchener-Waterloo. Data collected included three focus group interviews, seven key informant interviews, a document review, and a research process journal. Findings were organized around motivation, guiding values and principles, resources, processes, actions, partnerships, dynamics, and sustainability. Shared values and principles emerged as the passion and the glue that drove and cemented the change process. Human resources, particularly English as a Second Language teachers, were essential players in supporting refugee children. Schools were revealed as ideal settings within which to promote competence, foster respect for diversity, and buffer these children from the negative consequences of war, refugeeism, and settlement. Creating a sense of safety and belonging in the school and in the community was seen as the most crucial element in the healing process of refugee children. A universal approach was favoured since it avoided further stigmatizing and revictimizing refugee children, and benefited all children struggling with issues of diversity. A framework based on support, outreach, education, and advocacy was proposed. A major conclusion of the research was that collective trauma such as war and refugeeism demands a collective, community-based response.

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Glossary of Acronyms

CSG	Community Support Group
EASC	Equity Action Schools Coalition
ESD	English Skills Development
ESL	English as a Second Language
ISAP	Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program
MHPP	Multicultural Health Promotion Program
NIMH	National Institute of Mental Health
PTSD	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
STTWG	Survivors of Torture and Trauma Working Group
WRDSB	Waterloo Region District School Board

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

Over the past decades, Canada has become home to an increasing number of refugee children and their families who have fled from conditions of war and persecution. Although many government bodies, community agencies, and private citizens have worked to help these people adapt to their new communities, little is known about developing programs to support refugee children as they heal from their traumatic experiences of war and refugeeism.

The purpose of my thesis was to examine the process of planning and developing school-based community supports that promote the well-being of refugee children. To do this, I investigated and documented the experience of a community group with which I was, and still am, involved - the Community Support Group (CSG) - a subgroup of the Survivors of Torture and Trauma Working Group (STTWG) - as it worked to initiate supports for children survivors of war trauma. It was my hope that this study would contribute to the successful implementation of local supports, provide some ideas for how to establish similar supports for refugee children, and add to the understanding of how to plan and develop prevention programs in general.

Personal Interest and Motivation in Undertaking This Work

I came to this research influenced by my experiences in community and international development, and as a mother. Primary among my values are compassion and a commitment to social justice and social change, both globally and locally. Born by chance into a privileged background, I grew up with the belief that I have a personal

responsibility to use my privileged position to advocate and work with others to change unjust and inequitable situations and systems. Through my work in community and international development, I have been fortunate to learn from and be inspired by many people, particularly from Latin America, who share a fundamental commitment to social justice and social change. I have learned to see myself as a citizen of a global community and my neighbours as more than the people who live on my street. My experiences as a mother have strengthened my compassion and sense of responsibility for children. If my own children struggle as they do with the normal injustices of childhood life, it must be that much more difficult for children who, in addition, have lived through war and refugeeism in their country of origin and now face issues of adaptation and racism in their new home. At the same time, I recognize and marvel at children's resilience and capacity to heal. A sensitive and appropriately responsive community can make this healing process easier for them and one that leaves fewer long-term scars. Finally, I have a strong belief in the community development process; that is, a process in which people take charge of and improve their lives and their community. By working together, people can share ideas, strengths, and resources to build better communities for us all.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I drew from two different sets of literature while planning and implementing my thesis. One set of readings addressed the increasing presence of refugee children in both Canada and our own community, and the impact of the trauma they face as a result of their refugee flight. I also sought information related to building school-based community supports for refugee children, which was the approach that had been chosen for

responding to this issue.

The Issue

Refugee Children in our Midst

A review of national and local government and agency documents shows that there is an increasing number of refugee children in our midst. In line with its immigration and refugee policies and practices, Canada receives every year about 25,000 to 35,000 people who are officially designated as "convention refugees," or approximately 10-15% of the total 240,000 immigrants admitted annually (A Broader Vision, 1994). Most agencies and government documents define refugees as people who are forced to flee their native countries because of war or a well-founded fear of persecution (Into the 21st Century, 1994).

Current government policies project that Canada's trend of official refugee intake will remain constant in the years to come (A Broader Vision, 1994). Within this total number, however, the number of women and children is likely to increase. For over a decade, it has been common knowledge among humanitarian agencies and acknowledged by some government officials that about 80% of all refugees are women and children, and yet families without a male parental figure have until recently found it more difficult to qualify for admission into this country. The Refugee Plan issued by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration in 1994 finally acknowledged this fact by giving special consideration and advantage to women and children applying to resettle in Canada, thus increasing their numbers.

The Kitchener-Waterloo area is ranked within the top 4 in terms of receiving

recent immigrants to Canada (Waterloo Region Community Health Department, 1999). Seskar-Hencic (1999) contends that, locally as well as nationally, the actual number of refugees is higher than the official figures indicate, since many people who come as "family class" and " assisted relative class" immigrants have also been refugees. She also points to the effect of secondary migration, which brings close to 30% more refugees to this area than are officially designated by the government. Secondary migrants are people who are officially destined for and settled in other areas of the country who later choose to move elsewhere. Secondary migrants choose Waterloo Region as a safe, welcoming place with a relatively low unemployment rate, a highly developed manufacturing sector, and many support programs. We can conclude from this brief overview that this region will continue to receive new refugee children into our community at least at the same rate as in the past, and probably at a greater rate, given the new emphasis on receiving women and children and the effects of secondary migration.

By examining information obtained from the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), it becomes apparent that the number of new immigrant and refugee children registered in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes has risen dramatically over the past five years. Between September 1993 and September 1998, the total number of ESL children in WRDSB elementary schools alone had risen from 1359 to 3107. As of September 1998, 16 WRDSB elementary and senior public schools had over 30 ESL students and 14 had over 50 ESL students. Eight had over 100 ESL students: A.R. Kaufman, Crestview, Forest Hill, Howard Robertson, J. F. Carmichael, Linwood, Southridge, and Westmount. In addition to this, over 600 secondary level students were

also receiving ESL support. Seskar-Hencic reported that in 1993, of the 2100 students registered in ESL, 820 children, or about 40%, originated from countries that experienced war or that hosted refugee populations (Seskar Hencic, 1996). She recently indicated to me that this trend has not changed (Personal communication, March 12, 1999), meaning that about 1240 ESL children currently in WRDSB elementary schools have had refugee experiences.

The Impact of War Trauma on Refugee Children

A number of authors agree that war trauma represents one of the most traumatic of human experiences (Foy, 1992; Pynoos & Eth, 1996; Williams, 1991). All children who have lived in a war zone have been exposed to stressful and traumatic experiences, the most devastating of which may lead to severe and prolonged psycho-social problems (Allodi & Cowgill, 1982). Traumatic experiences of refugee children can range from the relatively mild, such as fleeing their homes with their families safe and intact, to the horrific, for example witnessing the deaths of family members or experiencing torture.

A review of the literature indicates that there is an increasing tendency among researchers toward using an ecological model when thinking about the impact of war trauma on children (Ahearn & Athey, 1991; Elbedour, Bensel, & Bastien, 1993; Garbarino, 1989). This model, which is described in greater detail in the section called "Ecological Framework," is based on the concept that individual and collective behaviours are shaped by and interact with the environments within which they occur. When applied to human communities, it provides a useful framework that takes into account the diversity, complexity, and interrelatedness of factors that may affect a child's response to

traumatic events. These factors include a child's genetic and other biological strengths and vulnerabilities, personality characteristics, stage of development, family capacity to remain intact and offer support, and duration and intensity of the traumatic event (Athey & Ahearn, 1991). The ecological framework also makes it possible to take into account factors from the surrounding community that may support or inhibit a child's emotional healing process.

Many authors recognize the resiliency of children and their capacity to overcome adversity, and use this as their starting point in discussing the impact of war trauma (Athey & Ahearn, 1991; Beiser, Dion, Gotowiec, Hyman, & Nhi, 1995; De Monchy, 1991). Athey and Ahearn (1991) contend that although children have been exposed to events and circumstances that put them "at risk" for developing psycho-social problems, "risk is not destiny and children can and do overcome adversity" (p. 4). In fact, the presence of their families in our community is proof of their resilience and ability to survive.

Nevertheless, certain events, especially those related to war and refugeeism, have negative consequences for children that must be overcome. Some experiences may be so severe that no child could emerge from them without harm, although the extent and form of the child's reaction may vary. The concept of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which was first introduced by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980, has been adopted by many as the most suitable diagnostic tool for describing the critical symptoms typically experienced by the refugee population (Garbarino, 1989). Those that are of particular interest in relation to children include, but are not limited to, regressive

behaviour, aggression, repetitive play around trauma-related themes, recurrent bad dreams, heightened startle reflex, guilt, grief, changes in school performance, personality changes, and a variety of depressive and anxiety symptoms (Garbarino, 1989; Hicks, Lalonde, & Pepler, 1993; Williams, 1991). Although PTSD initially represented a significant advance in diagnostics, Seskar-Hencic (1996) argues that it is neither sufficient nor appropriate for all forms of trauma, including those related to war and refugeeism. Her reasons appear to be related to her use of the ecological framework for understanding the impact of war trauma on children and the fact that the PTSD is an individual-centred diagnostic tool. First, war may be understood as a collective trauma that affects whole communities and societies and as such may destroy all normal values, ways of behaving, and sources of support for children and their families. This dimension of trauma is not accounted for by the PTSD model. Second, war may affect children both directly and indirectly in ways that do not meet the normal criteria for trauma as assumed by the PTSD. Third, the circumstances of refugeeism and resettlement often extend the traumatizing experience beyond the time and direct experience of war. The PTSD model does not typically include these post-event stressors.

Refugee children's war and post-war experiences are characterized by trauma, loss, and deprivation. Traumatic stressors can be defined as events perceived by the victims as a direct threat to life or as terrifying, overwhelming, and outside the range of normal life experiences, often resulting in a sense of helplessness, anxiety, and instinctual arousal (Athey & Ahearn 1991; Bolin, 1985; Eth & Pynoos, 1985). All children exposed to war trauma are affected in some way. The degree to which they are affected varies

according to the amount of violence they have witnessed or experienced, the presence or absence of personal injury, the age and developmental stage of the child, the extent to which family members have been affected, and the ability of the family to provide support. In addition to traumatic stressors, refugee children are affected by the loss of their sense of security and well-being, their homes, familiar routines, possessions, friends, and frequently close family members. They may also be deprived of the basic necessities of life such as food, water, shelter, and medical care. The few authors who have examined the cumulative effects of trauma, loss, and deprivation on children have found that they are particularly vulnerable to the additive and complicating nature of these combined factors (Kinzie, Sack, Angel, Manson, & Roth, 1986; Pynoos & Eth, 1985).

If children can experience these terrible events and overcome them, what factors enable them to cope successfully? Coping can be defined as "behaviour that protects the individual from internal and external stresses" (Athey & Ahearn, 1991, p. 9). Coping behaviours include avoiding the source of stress, ignoring it, denying the outcome, and finding ways to tolerate it. Children who cope well with stress-producing situations are often known as "stress-resistant" or "resilient." Three broad categories or protective factors have been identified by Garmezy (1987) that help a child to cope: the child's personality disposition; a supportive environment; and an external support system that encourages the child's coping efforts. In particular, Garmezy found that children with greater assets (e.g., higher IQ, higher socioeconomic status, and family stability) coped better than those with fewer such assets. Rutter (1983) highlighted the importance of immediate family and/or other relatives, friends, neighbours, and community members in

supporting successful coping outcomes for children. Garbarino (1992) found this to be true as well in the case of children and war-related stressors.

Although families can play an important role in ameliorating the effects of stressful events on children, they may also be unable to provide the support that children need or may even make it worse. Barriers to parents supporting their children include the parents' own experiences and capacity to cope, fear, loss of status and control over the situation, changes in roles, previous problems in family functioning, type of migration experience, and social and economic status prior to and since becoming refugees (Ahearn & Athey, 1991; Elbedour et al., 1993; Hicks, Lalonde, & Pepler, 1993; Williams, 1991). In this case, community supports, such as schools, ethnic groups, and others may become a particularly important source of support (Beiser et al.,1995; Elbedour et al., 1993; Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994; Silka & Tip, 1994).

The Approach

Numerous bodies of literature informed my thinking about how to approach the problem of responding to the needs of refugee children. They included literature on: a) applying an ecological framework to social interventions in human communities; b) concepts of prevention programming for children, and the theory and practice of health promotion; c) developing community-based strategies to respond to community problems; d) values-based research and intervention; e) the value and process of building partnerships; and f) the nature and impact of school climate and culture. In many cases, these themes emerged spontaneously from the work of the CSG and I searched out corresponding literature to better understand them. In other cases, I was able to use my

new knowledge of the literature to explicitly or implicitly inform the work of the group. Either way, it was a rich learning experience for me to simultaneously read the theory and see it illustrated in practice.

An Ecological Framework

Concepts from biology and human ecology were first brought together and applied to social intervention by Kelly (1966). The ecological perspective states that the behaviour of individuals is best understood as an interaction between people and their environments (Juras, Mackin, Curtis, & Foster-Fishman, 1997; Kloos, McCoy, Stewart, Thomas, Wiley, Good, Hunt, Moore, & Rappaport, 1997; Trickett, 1994, 1997). It is based on four basic principles of ecology as borrowed from biology and applied in a social context: a) adaptation, b) cycling of resources, c) interdependence, and d) succession.

Adaptation focuses attention on the influence the surrounding environment has on an organism; to survive, an individual, organization, or community must be able to adjust to its environment (Juras et al., 1997). People in transition, such as refugee children, often need help to adapt, either from families, human service agencies, or other community resources. Schools can be a valuable source of such help for children. In seeking to build school-based supports for refugee children, the principle of adaptation points toward the importance of examining the school environment itself to see what demands the school places on children and how these encourage or inhibit the adaptation of refugee children (Trickett & Birman, 1987). It also calls attention to the resources available to provide these supports (Juras et al., 1997; Kelly, 1966).

The second principle, cycling of resources, refers to the ways in which biological

systems or communities develop, distribute, and use resources. The availability and distribution of resources can be a major issue in schools, but can be resolved if interventionists are able to identify and access previously untapped or non-traditional resources (Juras et. al., 1997). Working from a resource perspective, one is prompted to ask about a school setting: What resources are needed for this intervention? and, Do these resources exist within the school or can they be obtained elsewhere? Identifying necessary resources that are available over a period of time that is long enough to allow for significant change is a also key factor in any intervention (Trickett & Birman, 1989).

The principle of interdependence addresses the transactional nature of change within a biological or human system: not only do changes in the system affect the individuals within it, but changes made by individuals affect the system itself. In planning or examining an intervention within a social system such as a school, the interdependence principle highlights the need to examine at least five things: a) relationships between people and groups within the school and the community; b) how policies and distribution of resources affect people and how they can affect these in return; c) the dynamics of power and politics; d) external demands and constraints on the intervention; and e) all possible positive and negative outcomes of the activity (Juras et al., 1997; Trickett & Birman, 1989).

The final principle, succession, refers to the fact that systems are continually changing over time and seeking a more stable state. This change is often cyclical, with a pattern that can be instructive if it is attended to. Trickett and Birman (1989) remind us that the concept of succession as observed in a school setting calls attention to the history

of the school and how it has adapted to changes in the past. For those interested in sustaining change at a systems level, the principle of succession also highlights the need to consider how to create a stable state.

The ecological model, when applied to human communities, provides a most useful orienting framework that takes into account the diversity, complexity, and interrelatedness of people and environments. It can also lead, as it did in this thesis, to a valuable set of research questions about the changeability, resources, interrelationships, and patterns of change that need to be considered when understanding issues and planning interventions (Trickett & Birman, 1989).

Concepts of Prevention and Health Promotion in Programming for Children

As has been stated previously, all children exposed to war trauma are affected in some way, either by physical and emotional trauma, loss, or deprivation. The Report of the Canadian Task Force on Mental Health Issues Affecting Immigrants and Refugees (Beiser et al., 1988) states that the needs of this group of children and youth are so pressing that immediate action should be taken to promote their emotional well-being by changing community attitudes and school programs. Seskar-Hencic (1996) points out that, although the number of immigrant support programs in Canada appears to be increasing, few are well-documented or evaluated and most focus on the adult population. Clearly there is a need to develop and document primary prevention programs that promote the well-being of refugee children.

Rae-Grant (1994) comments that serious study of prevention programs that enhance children's mental well-being has begun only within the past decade. In her review

of the literature, she makes a strong case for primary prevention as a way of narrowing the gap between growing needs and shrinking access to treatment for children's emotional and behavioural problems, a perspective that is echoed in other studies (Johnson, Malone, & Hightower, 1997). Durlak and Wells (1997) define primary prevention in mental health as "an intervention intentionally designed to reduce the future incidence of adjustment problems in currently normal populations as well as efforts directed at the promotion of mental health functioning" (p.115). At least four concepts are essential to understanding the process of prevention programming. These are: a) the approaches for choosing and designing programs for target populations; b) the importance of an ecological perspective in making sense of the diverse factors and processes involved in prevention; c) the notion of multiple, interacting risk and protective factors; and d) the importance of timing in determining outcomes.

Within the area of prevention, Durlak and Wells (1997) describe three strategies for selecting and responding to priority populations. "Universal prevention measures" are those that are desirable for an entire population, such as a tobacco prevention education program for all students in a senior public school. "Selective preventive measures" are those priorizing a portion of a population that is believed to be at risk for a particular problem, as in the case of all children of alcoholic parents. The "indicated preventive intervention" aims to reach high-risk individuals with detectable symptoms.

The ecological perspective has clearly become the framework of choice among many of the foremost prevention researchers (Bogenschneider, 1996; Kloos et al., 1997; Peirson & Prilleltensky, 1994; Rae-Grant, 1994; Trickett, 1989; Weinstein & Soule,

1991). When planning and evaluating primary prevention programs for children, it is important to consider not only child factors but also family environments, stressful life events, institutions with which the child is involved, and the interaction of all these elements (Rae-Grant, 1994).

A recent review of prevention research in the area of mental health revealed three key findings about the relationship between risk and protective factors on the one hand, and negative and positive outcomes on the other (NIMH [National Institute of Mental Health], 1995). First, for many mental disorders, several risk factors are necessary. For example, risk factors for drug abuse among children include their genetic and personality characteristics, their stage of development, parenting and other family aspects, the influence of peers, and the nature of the their school and community environment. Second, the greater the number of risk factors to which children are exposed, the greater the likelihood that a problem will occur (Rae-Grant, 1994). Some research indicates that this relationship may be exponential for many childhood mental disorders (Rae-Grant, 1994). Third, some risk factors are both general and serious; in other words, they may be risk factors for many different disorders and may have a high likelihood of causing a problem. An example is attention deficit disorders in early childhood that negatively influence a child's ability to succeed at school, which may, in turn, lead to both immediate and long-term behaviour problems and limited life choices.

This concept of multiple, interacting risk and protective factors is essential to understanding prevention. Risk and protective factors are those characteristics of people and their environments that influence their chances of avoiding, developing, or

overcoming a serious problem (Reiss & Price, 1996). It is important to note that some authors choose to use the word "process" or "mechanism" rather than the more static term "factor" in order to highlight the dynamic and complex nature of cause and effect (Bogenschneider, 1996; Rae-Grant, 1994; Reiss & Price, 1996). In describing risk and protective factors or processes, Rae-Grant (1994) has divided them into those related to the child, the family, and the community. Child risk factors include biological and genetic aspects, such as prenatal conditions, below average intelligence, developmental delays, difficult temperament, and chronic illness. Aspects of the family environment that would put the child at risk would be family conflict and stress, poor parent/child interaction, and poor parenting practices. Examples of community factors that could have a negative impact on a child are poverty, overcrowding, and high crime rates.

Likewise, researchers have described the child, family, and community protective factors and processes that positively influence outcomes for children (Johnson, 1997; Rae-Grant, 1994). Although the research into these protective factors is still less well-developed than that into risk factors, there is evidence that some key individual characteristics and social supports can ameliorate the effects of biological and psychosocial risks during childhood. Child protective factors include a positive temperament, above-average intelligence, good problem-solving skills, and the ability to relate well to and get along with others. Family factors that support children's ability to withstand and overcome stress include supportive parents, family closeness, smaller family structure, and adequate rule setting. Community factors that enhance positive outcomes are closely related to the child's own capacity to take advantage of community supports:

a) at least average intelligence and a personality that generates positive feelings in family members and other adults; b) good relationships with parents; and c) an external support system that provides positive feedback.

Timing is the last essential concept in understanding prevention programming for children. The nature, timing, persistence, and severity of risk factors, as well as the gender, age, and stage of development of the child all have an influence on positive and negative outcomes. A traumatic event may have more or less of an impact on a child, depending on the developmental stage in the child's life at which it occurs. For example, Avison (1992) demonstrated that maternal alcohol problems have the greatest effect on the behaviours of young boys. Likewise, a positive home environment has its strongest protective effect on young children, whereas this lessens as children grow older and are more strongly influenced by their peers.

An extensive review of 177 primary prevention programs designed to prevent behavioural and social problems in children and adolescents was recently completed by Durlak and Wells (1997). Its findings provide empirical support that preventive interventions can improve the positive development of children and adolescents, at least in the short-term. Significantly, it revealed that: a) the major proportion of high quality research demonstrating positive outcomes has been based on health promotion and competence enhancement programs; b) most current research is focused on outcomes and includes little or no description of program implementation; c) there has been little work done on evaluating the impact of the intervention on the setting in which it occurred; and d) there is little information on partnerships that may have existed or could have been

developed between the intervention and the host setting (Trickett, 1997; Weissberg & Bell, 1997). When I examined this study's extensive bibliography, I found no prevention studies specific to planning and developing prevention programs for refugee children, leading me to assume that little or no work has been done, or at least published, in this area.

The concepts of illness prevention and health promotion are closely linked. While the first is aimed at preventing health problems, the second is oriented towards general health and well-being. Health promotion can be defined as an enabling process that "draws on human and material resources in the community to enhance self-help and social support...based on full and continuous access to information [and] learning opportunities for health" (World Health Organization, 1986, p. 7). Since health promotion is based on a positive health-oriented perspective, it focuses on reinforcing an individual's or a community's inherent strengths. In the case of refugee children, a health promotion approach should include the concept of resilience. Although children can be vulnerable to illness and injury, they also have a strong tendency and ability to heal quickly, as the literature on resilience confirms (e.g., Ahearn & Athey, 1991; Benard, 1987; Cowen & Work, 1998). Some authors have recently begun to recommend that it is time to move beyond a focus on risk and spend some time learning how to create conditions that promote and support the resilience and mental well-being of refugee children (Bogenschneider, 1996; Johnson, 1997).

Concepts of Community Development and Capacity-building

A key assumption of community development is that change is accomplished most effectively through the participation of the people affected by an issue (Levine & Perkins, 1997). They have the best knowledge of the need, the local resources available, and the solutions most likely to work. More importantly, they are also the ones with the greatest stake in a successful outcome. Their involvement strengthens the level of community commitment and increases the chance of developing an effective and sustainable program.

A community development approach builds on and enhances the skills and resources of community members, is respectful and inclusive, fosters democratic participation, and works towards strengthening people's capacity to develop solutions to their own problems (Levine & Perkins, 1997; Rothman & Tropman, 1987). The process by which community development takes place is as important as the change outcome which is its goal. It involves deliberately weaving a web of continuing relationships that not only bring people together around a common issue, but also creates in them a sense of belonging to their community (Pilisuk, McAllister, & Rothman, 1996).

The notion of capacity-building, as one community development strategy, has been popularized largely through the work of the American activist and author John McKnight (1995). Many approaches to community issues start by focusing attention on a community's problems and needs. McKnight argues that such an orientation creates a sense of hopelessness and helplessness by highlighting a community's deficits and weaknesses, rather than identifying its capacities and strengths. This fear was voiced by refugee parents in Seskar-Hencic's (1996) thesis. They feared that focusing on their

children's war experiences and the resulting trauma might draw attention to their children's problems in a way that would revictimize and stigmatize them, resulting in more harm than good. At the same time, both the literature and Seskar-Hencic's own research indicate the need for children to feel free to voice their feelings about their refugee experiences and be confident that they will be supported in working them through (Rousseau, 1993; Seskar-Hencic, 1996). Rousseau (1993) emphasized that the "impact of the unexpressed" (p. 13) has negative consequences on children and that these have been repeatedly documented in clinical settings. In building school-based community supports for refugee children, starting from a belief in the capacity of children, their families, their school, and the community is an empowering and enabling concept that can help participants see strengths in place of weaknesses, potential instead of problems, and survivors rather than victims.

Values-Based Research and Intervention

Prilleltensky, Peirson and Nelson (1997) propose a values framework for community psychologists that is based on five key sets of values: a) caring and compassion; b) health; c) self-determination and participation; d) human diversity; and e) distributive justice. Their framework is particularly relevant to this thesis since the experience from which they derive it is a school-based prevention program. They point out that the values of caring and compassion are eloquently described by Sarason (1988) as a "sense of community," a phrase that captures people's need and desire for social support, feelings of belonging, acceptance, and emotional bonding. They also make the link between people's sense of community and their feelings of solidarity. The second

value in their framework, health, is defined in its broadest sense as the emotional, physical, social, and spiritual well-being of individuals and the communities in which they live. In this definition, health is far more than the absence or reduction of individual and collective ills; it entails the promotion of competencies and protective factors as embodied in the theory and practice of health promotion. The third set of values, self-determination and participation, reflects a commitment to enabling people to speak out about and take control of the circumstances and decisions affecting their lives and communities. This is similar to the concept of empowerment which "promotes the participation of people, organizations, and communities toward the goals of increased individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of community life and social justice" (Lord & Hutchison, 1993, p.7). The fourth value, human diversity, is rooted in the need to respect people's diverse social identities and their right to define themselves. Community psychology recently has become more aware of the need to address diversity issues related to gender (Mulvey, 1988), sexual orientation (D'Augelli, 1994), ethnic and racial diversity (Johnson et al., 1997; Silka & Tip, 1994; Trickett, 1994), and disability (Fawcett et al., 1994). Interventionists who do not include this value in their work are likely to attempt approaches based on their own cultural bias that don't "fit" for other ethnocultural groups (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Jacob, 1995; Mukherjee, 1992; Silka & Tip, 1997). The final value, distributive justice, draws attention to the fair and equitable distribution of power, resources, and burdens in society (Labonté, 1993; Prilleltensky & Nelson, 1997; Prilleltensky et al., 1997). This value tends to receive little attention from community psychologists and many other professionals concerned with individual and collective well-

being (MacGillivary, Nelson, & Prilleltensky, 1998). The authors conclude that, without a commitment to this value, efforts to realize the previous four will be limited, since people will not have the power and resources they need in order to achieve them.

Building Partnerships

With resources dwindling, needs increasing, and social problems and their solutions becoming more complex, more individuals and community agencies are choosing to form partnerships in response to community concerns (Butterfoss, Goodman, & Wandersman, 1993; Gager & Elias, 1997; Labonté, 1993). A recent definition of partnership, born from the work of community psychologists MacGillivary et al. (1998), provides a comprehensive description of the "why, who, when, where, what, and how" of partnership building:

> "We define partnerships as value-based relationships between human service-providers and/or researchers and disadvantaged people; relationships that should strive to advance the values of caring, compassion, community, health, self-determination, participation, power-sharing, human diversity, and social justice for disadvantaged people, both in the processes and the outcomes of the partnership, and in multiple contexts." (MacGillivary et al., 1998, p. 5)

The values on which this definition is based are neatly congruent with the previously stated concepts of community development and capacity-building. Several points made by MacGillivary et al. (1998) in elaborating each of these values are particularly relevant to this thesis. In speaking of caring, compassion, and community, they state that partnerships with disadvantaged people should strive to create relationships in which they feel safe, accepted, and comfortable. This would seem to be particularly important for refugees who are fleeing extremely unsafe, intolerant, and stressful conditions. The same writers

also observe that partnerships with disadvantaged groups should avoid person-centred and deficit-oriented medical models of health and opt instead for "population-based, systems-level interventions that focus on competency building and the promotion of protective factors" (p. 9). This view is in keeping with the conclusions of others in the field (Grant, 1994; Johnson et al., 1997; Kloos et al., 1997; Silka & Tip, 1994). MacGillivary et al. (1998) stress that personal dignity is closely tied to the levels of control people feel and experience, since vulnerable people feel powerless and need to recover a sense of their own worth and of being in control over their own lives. Thus the values of participation, empowerment, and self-determination should translate into concrete support for giving "voice and choice" to those whose voices have gone unheard and whose choices have been limited or ignored.

Individual partners' primary motivation to look after someone else's needs is based in the primary values of caring, compassion, and community (MacGillivary et al., 1998). Their motivation to do this collaboratively is based on a number of additional factors. Labonté (1993) asserts that a reasonable base of other shared values is an essential ingredient in successful collaboration. Butterfoss et al. (1993) state that a common "visionary" or superordinate goal is necessary to draw partners together across differences. They also mention increased networking, information sharing, access to resources, and attaining desired outcomes from collective efforts as benefits that attract people to coalition work.

The process of building partnerships with disadvantaged people is equally important to enduring relationships and successful outcomes. These result when partners:

share basic values, principles and goals; spend time building strong relationships based on mutual respect, open dialogue, and trust; clarify roles, resources, and responsibilities; and work for equitable ways of power-sharing and decision-making (Butterfoss et al., 1993; Labonté, 1993; MacGillivary et al., 1998). More powerful partners, such as professionals and institutional members, bear a special responsibility for learning how to share power and decision-making. They must be prepared to search for new ways of accommodating and nurturing real participation of disadvantaged people and groups. This may include such things as changing traditional meeting times and places, rotating leadership, and creating less formal styles of meetings. It also includes an openness to stepping outside of traditional "comfort zones," being prepared to have values and assumptions challenged, and venturing into areas in which social and cultural norms may be different and even uncomfortable (Church, 1997).

School Climate and Culture

Early in the research it became apparent to me that the environment of the school was going to be an important factor in building school-based supports for refugee children. I searched the literature on school climate and culture, particularly as these foster the contextual conditions of student learning and development. According to Kuh (1993), the term school climate refers to how students, staff, and other members of a school experience their institution. He observes that most climate measures focus on: a) perceptions of organizational functioning, such as goal-setting, decision-making, and resource allocation and/or b) effective responses to experiences with the institution, such as feelings of loyalty, commitment, satisfaction, and a general sense of belonging. Kuh

defines school culture as the qualities of an institution's character. He goes on to explain that this institutional culture is the collective pattern shaped by such factors as history, mission, physical setting, norms, traditions, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behaviour of individuals and groups within the school setting. Simply put, school climate refers to the "feel" or atmosphere of a school, while school culture describes the traditions and values, and formal and informal guidelines that govern the behaviour of those within it.

Reporting on a review of 2,600 studies on the impact of college on students, Kuh (1993) cites four important conclusions. First, students benefit more from their school experience when their total level of school involvement - academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular - is mutually supporting. Second, involvement in all these areas of the school experience enhances student learning. Third, no single experience, policy, or program is likely to have a dramatic influence on the attitudes and behaviours of most students; rather, increased learning and development occur when these are integrated and complementary. And finally, students who feel that they belong and are valued as individuals are more likely to take advantage of a school's resources. Kuh's overall conclusion is that an institution's contextual conditions, or its school climate and culture, are more important to student learning and personal development than individual staff, quality of resources, organizational structures, or specific academic or student activity programs. In his study of nine elementary schools in diverse settings in British Columbia, Coleman (1984) found that the principal's leadership is critical for effective schools, a finding shared by other authors (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Johnson et al., 1997). He also

concluded that efforts to improve school climate need to be school-based and school-specific. In other words, the school itself is the vital unit of analysis and thus more important for change efforts than individuals or school districts.

As the work on my research progressed, I realized that racism is a key factor in how refugee children experience school climate and culture. Webster's Encyclopaedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (1996) defines racism as "a belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human races determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to rule others" (p. 1591). The same source offers a broad definition of race as a group of people united by such things as common history, language, and cultural traits. As families from different countries come into schools and communities that have largely been populated and shaped by people from Anglo Saxon backgrounds, there is often serious racial discrimination. If the goal of the CSG and this research project is to contribute to building school-based community supports for refugee children, then attention must be paid to anti-racist principles and education.

As Endicott and Mukherjee point out in their document An Anti-Racist Framework and An Anti-Racist Manual for School Boards (1992), the call to address issues of racism is coming from visible minority, native, and ethnoculturally diverse communities, as well as others who want their children to live and grow in a society undivided by race. As society changes, and because of the educational function that schools exist to fulfill, schools and school systems are expected to do more than teach basic academic skills. Many parents, staff, students, and other community members who

are passionately dedicated to public education as a system for human growth are urging schools to play a stronger role in transmitting positive values, ethics, and behaviours to children. In addressing issues of racism, all aspects of the school system's structure are relevant, including: hiring and promotion of staff; student concerns, such as the placement and promotion of students; and what is taught in the classroom, and how it is taught (Endicott & Muhherjee, 1992; Mukherjee, 1992). Racist remarks and incidents do not occur in a vacuum; they are a reflection of and are reinforced by the systems and practices of the institutions of which we are a part. As Endicott and Mukherjee (1992) assert, addressing racism:

> "...requires a systems-wide approach. It cannot be achieved by intervening at the individual level when a complaint occurs, nor by adding on pleasant or positive information about the exotic or superficial aspects of the various minority communities. Rather, it requires a critical questioning of the system's assumptions, of the way things are done in the classroom and across the system, and of the people doing them. To assist in the questioning, the school board will need people from racially visible and aboriginal groups, who can serve as models for their children and for the student population as a whole." (p.12)

This is an essential part of the work of creating safe, supportive environments in which refugee children can feel a true sense of acceptance and belonging.

Findings in my research prompted me to go beyond the literature on anti-racism to learn more about a broader term now being used: anti-oppression. This term is used to describe any work that addresses issues of prejudice and discrimination practised by a dominant group against any other group with identifiable differences, including race, gender, culture, religion, class, economic status, sexual preference, age, or physical and mental ability (Garcia & Van Soest, 1997; Latting, 1990). According to Westhues

(Personal communication, May 4, 1999), it is an important concept for three reasons: it is inclusive of all the "isms"; it avoids creating a hierarchy of oppression; and it normalizes the experience of being different. The same principles expressed in the anti-racism literature cited above apply to anti-oppression work. The role of schools in teaching and practising equity across difference is also the same

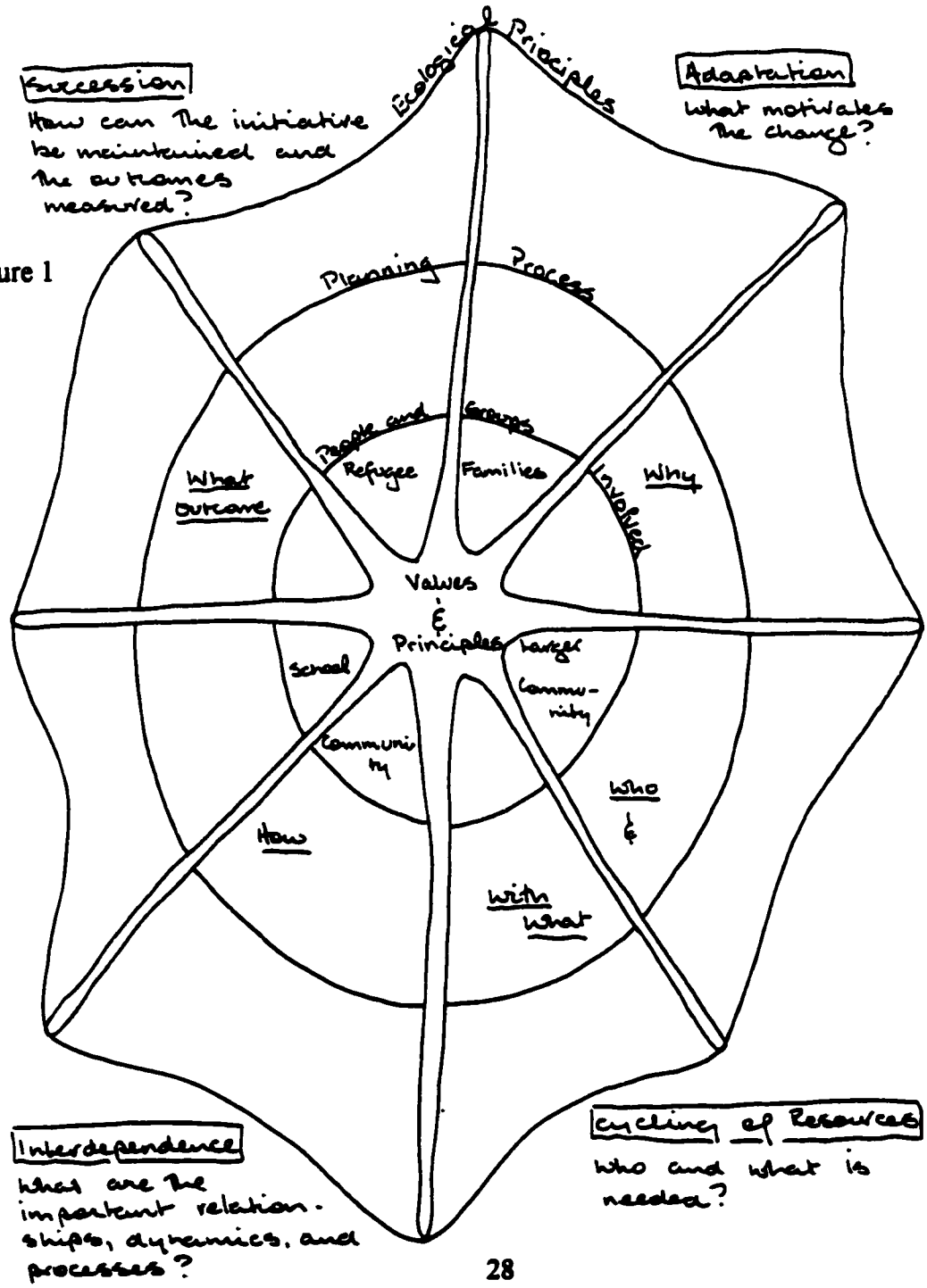
PURPOSE, GOALS, AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this thesis was to document the process of planning and developing school-based community supports that promote the well-being of refugee children. It is an example of generative research since it involved "the accumulation and analysis of information necessary for the subsequent development of prevention programs. Findings from such research should serve as guides which define, direct, and/or correct the implementation and evaluation of the intervention..." (Lorion, 1983, p. 258). As a community-oriented researcher, I was committed to both research and action. My primary *research goal* was to document an approach to developing preventive supports for refugee children that may be useful in establishing similar initiatives elsewhere, and to add to the understanding of how to plan and develop prevention programs in general. My primary *action goal* was to contribute to the successful implementation of this local program.

In an effort to illustrate the different elements I was trying to bring together in this research - values and principles, multiple levels of stakeholders and intervention, planning processes, and the ecological model that framed the work - I developed Figure 1. The values were clearly at the heart of the work and radiated out into all aspects of it. Around

the values were the people involved, who held enough of these values in common to be motivated to work together. Next to the people involved were the basic steps in the planning process that determined the "why, who, what, how, and what outcome" of the initiative. Finally the perimeter was framed by the four ecological principles; since environments and situations are in a constant state of change, the perimeter was represented by a wavy line.

Figure 1



The major research question I asked was: How do we plan and develop school-based community supports for refugee children? This question and more detailed ones designed to obtain specific information are presented in Table 1 and flow from the ideas presented in Figure 1. I was seeking information and insights about: a) the key values and principles that drive such an initiative; b) the kinds of human and material resources needed; c) the various processes, partnerships, and dynamics involved and their impact on individuals and communities; and d) how to sustain and document the desired outcomes.

Table 1. Research Questions

Primary Research Question	
How do we plan and develop school-based community supports for refugee children?	
Specific Research Questions	
1.	What values motivate people (refugee families, school communities, and outside community groups) to become involved in developing support programs for refugee children? What principles are important in guiding the process?
2.	What human and material resources are needed? What resources already exist within schools and what resources need to be obtained elsewhere? What resources can refugee children and their families bring? What resources can community groups contribute?
3.	What processes, partnerships, and dynamics are involved and what is their impact? What processes are part of building school-based community supports? What are the forces for and against these processes? What is the nature of the partnerships and relationships? What are the benefits and risks for the various groups involved? What are some potential unanticipated results?
4.	What positive changes are anticipated? How and why should they be documented or measured? What has to happen for the process to continue over the long term? What factors may enhance or inhibit the process's sustainability? How can positive factors be enhanced and negative factors be overcome?

METHODOLOGY

Research Assumptions: A Values-based, Qualitative, Participatory, Action-oriented Approach

In planning and implementing this research, I adopted a values-based approach similar to the school-based one described by Prilleltensky et al. (1997). I came to this research sharing their conviction that school interventions (and other community-based research and action) need to be based on a framework that integrates values, research, and action, and that these values need to be referred to and reflected throughout the action-research process. My belief was affirmed by my thesis research experience and results. The participants themselves identified values similar to those named by Prilleltensky et al. (1997) and asserted their fundamental importance in drawing people to this work and guiding its implementation.

Since the focus of the thesis was to learn from the experience of planning and developing school-based community supports for refugee children, a grounded theory approach was used to capture this learning. Grounded theory works to create new ideas and understanding based on studying and learning from the details of individuals and groups and their social experiences to discover important patterns and interrelationships. It is based on two themes - naturalistic inquiry and inductive analysis - that are part of a strategy of qualitative inquiry elaborated by Patton (1990). Rather than starting from a set theory and testing it to see if it works, I used these qualitative methods to collect information and seek new theories based on people's experience of responding to the needs of refugee children.

Three other key themes from Patton's qualitative inquiry strategy strongly influenced the research: a) the importance of using a holistic perspective; b) the value of the researcher's personal contact with and insights into the research setting; and c) the need for a flexible approach to the research design and methods. Using a holistic perspective led me to look at all the pieces in "the big picture" and to try to understand how they fit together and interacted. The impact of war trauma on refugee children depends on multiple factors and dynamics, including each child's unique combination of personality, family background, war experience, developmental stage, and current life situation. In the same way, school-based community supports designed to enhance these children's resilience must be thought of as a complex and dynamic whole, composed of interdependent parts.

Patton (1990) stresses the value of the researcher's personal contacts with people in the research setting and encourages researchers to include their own insights about the research as an integral part of the data. My role as a researcher was, of necessity, one of "passionate participant" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), since this was an initiative with which I had been involved for several years. I was able to use my relationship with CSG members and with my community contacts to get close to the people and the situation being studied in order to facilitate people telling their own stories and engaging in reflection. My in-depth knowledge of the community context helped me better understand what I heard in interviews and focus groups. I integrated my own voice into the research through journalling my observations and including them as part of the data.

Patton (1990) asserts that qualitative research designs cannot be completely

decided in advance of the research fieldwork. While it was important to me to have a clear idea of the primary research question and a well-thought-out plan for data collection and analysis, using a qualitative research approach made it possible to have an adaptable research process that unfolded with the fieldwork. Given the emergent nature of the thesis topic and the active participation I encouraged among members of the CSG and others in shaping the research, my approach to the study was "planned but flexible."

In reference to the involvement of participants in shaping the research, the thesis methodology could also be described as a modified participatory, action-oriented approach. I say "modified" since I consulted and involved stakeholders in as many decisions related to the research as possible; however, I did not have the experience, time, or resources to devote to training them as co-researchers, which is one of the expectations commonly stated in the literature (Papineau & Kiely, 1996; Patton, 1990).

Papineau and Kiely (1996) define participatory action research as an "integrated activity that combines social investigation, educational work, and action" (p. 7). One of the fundamental goals of participatory action research is to develop community initiatives that promote participants' empowerment (Papineau & Kiely, 1996). A key feature of this approach is the continuous cycle of action-research-action-research. I chose to use participatory action research for this thesis for several reasons. First, the initiative to develop supports for refugee children originated with the CSG; my thesis work was designed to enhance and document an idea that was already owned and being developed by the community. Imposing my methodology on this group without involving them in shaping it and seeking their support would have been unthinkable for me. It would have

violated the values-based approach described earlier, and wasted a chance to improve the research and make it more useful to the community. One of the negatives associated with research is that it is often something that is done *to* people. In contrast, this participatory approach provided the opportunity for people involved to shape and use the research process so that it met their needs as well as mine. For example, at one point CSG members decided they wanted to have the refugee children's perspective on their own needs, before the group decided what its next steps would be. Accordingly, I worked with the group to develop a discussion guide, to approach ESL teachers to use it with their students, and to pass the students' comments back to us.

Second, since the purpose of the thesis was to document how to plan and develop supports for refugee children, a process in which the CSG was involved, its members were, in large part, the focus of the research. It made sense to involve them in decisions related to this process of self-reflection. A significant way in which they shaped the thesis was through a discussion of the wording of the title of the thesis proposal. Initially I had called it "Planning and Developing a School-based Community Support Program for Refugee Children." As I noted in my journal, one CSG member felt the term "program" was too limiting: "if you don't 'fit' the program, then there is nothing for you." She felt our approach was more oriented towards a process of developing supports in which people are ready to respond to children's needs as they arise, rather than offering everyone the same program. Thus the thesis was finally named "Planning and Developing School-based Community Supports for Refugee Children." Numerous utilization studies show that the more involved community members are in the planning and implementation of

research, the more likely they are to use and disseminate the findings in the future (Papineau & Kiely, 1996). By involving the CSG in the research process, its members became familiar with knowledge and insights as they emerged from the research and were able to integrate this new information into their work of planning supports.

Research Context

Historical Background

Soon after being hired as the part-time coordinator of the Multicultural Health Promotion Project (MHPP) in April 1994, I met the coordinator of a local ESL day care program. A refugee herself, she shared with me her concern that many immigrant and refugee children were struggling with the effects of their war and refugee experiences and that there was little or no awareness or understanding of their situation, let alone any programs to respond to their needs. I began asking other newcomers and community workers about this and heard more stories of children's experiences, fears, and behavioural challenges at home and at school that confirmed the observations and insights of the day care coordinator. From local settlement workers, I learned that specific supports for survivors of war trauma were extremely limited in this community. I presented these informal findings to the MHPP Management Team and we agreed to try to initiate a process for responding to refugee children's needs.

As I approached other community organizations and agencies about being involved in such an initiative, I came in contact with Danijela Seskar-Hencic, a local settlement worker and now a recent graduate of the Master of Arts Community Psychology Program at Wilfrid Laurier University. She was very interested in knowing more about what we

were doing since she was in the process of finalizing her decision to do her thesis on refugee children. We agreed to work together to co-facilitate the initiative, along with someone from a local counselling agency.

In February, 1995, we held our first meeting and formed a community coalition to respond to the needs of children survivors of torture and trauma. A year later, in January 1996, we joined with a sister group and are now known as the Survivors of Torture and Trauma Working Group (STTWG). The following is the STTWG's Statement of Purpose:

> "We are a working group of individuals and organizations committed to developing community-based strategies in the Waterloo Region, to support children and adults who have experienced war, refugeeism, torture and trauma."

In addition to co-facilitating the STTWG, Danijela continued her thesis work and completed it in December 1996. Entitled "Breaking the Silence: New Immigrant Children Affected By War Trauma - Community Needs and Resources Assessment," it comprehensively documents the literature on children and war trauma, assesses the situation of refugee children in the local community, provides an overview of the local resources available to respond to their needs, and generates an insightful list of recommendations for action. It offers a firm basis for better understanding the situation of children survivors and is a rich source of ideas for preventive and supportive programs at the local level.

My close collaboration with Danijela had a significant influence on my own decision to return to school as a part-time student in the Community Psychology Program

in the fall of 1996. I continued to work for the MHPP and to co-facilitate the STTWG with Danijela. When it came time to choose a thesis topic, it seemed natural for me to build on this work.

Community Context

As one response to the issues faced by their immigrant and refugee students, staff of the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSG) invited a number of community agencies to join with them in forming the Equity Action Schools Coalition (EASC) in about 1992. Its purpose was to address newcomer children's needs in the school setting. They chose to focus their efforts in one elementary school that had a particularly high number of ESL students. The story of this initiative is presented as a case study at the beginning of the Results and Discussion section of this thesis.

About a year after the formation of the EASC, the STTWG was formed in the community to support the healing of children and adult survivors of war. The Community Support Group (CSG) is a subcommittee of the STTWG. Its focus is developing community supports for refugee children. As a first step, this group designed and implemented four three-hour workshops for ESL teachers of preschool to high school aged children, to increase the teachers' understanding of how to respond to the needs of refugee children in their classes. In discussing the purpose of one such workshop, the two ESL teacher members of the CSG urged other committee members not to think of the workshops as a "one-shot" exercise. They stressed that teachers and schools need continuing community support and resources in order to develop sustainable programs and changes to benefit newcomer children. During and subsequent to implementing the

workshops, the CSG explored and began to develop ways of working with teachers, schools, community groups, and refugee families to build school-based community supports for refugee children. It is this process and these learnings that this thesis seeks to document.

Around the end of 1996, the EASC gradually stopped meeting. I asked some of my research participants about this, since I thought there might be some important lessons to be learned about why they hadn't been able to continue. Some people had no clear idea why the group had ended; however, others suggested it might have been that key members had moved on, while still others felt the group had been dominated by people from the school system, with not enough effort made to involve more people from the grassroots level. Some EASC members who had the time and the interest began working with the STTWG instead.

Converging and Supportive Factors

In reflecting on the context for this research, I became aware of the number of convergent factors that could increase the potential interest in and success of this project. One was the amount of work that had already been done by groups such as the STTWG, the EASC, the Multicultural Health Coalition, settlement agencies, counselling agencies and other concerned community organizations. These groups had helped raise awareness of the issue, had begun educating themselves and other community members, and had begun to bring together the people and the resources needed to find and create ways of supporting people affected by war trauma. Second, as they became more settled and began to have a better understanding of how our system does and doesn't work, a number

of those same people affected by war started coming forward to share their stories, experiences, and tremendous learnings about what had and hadn't worked for them. Their commitment was rooted in their desire to make it easier for others than it had been for them and to continue their own healing process by working with others on this issue. Third, Danijela's thesis laid the groundwork for a well-thought out action. It provided a solid base of information about how war trauma may affect children and their families, the risk and protective factors that contribute to this, the size of the refugee population in our community and in our schools, and the importance of using a holistic, non-stigmatizing, capacity-building, community-based approach to any actions on this issue. Fourth, some school administrators had recently participated in a Principals' Group to respond to the needs of their ESL students; not only was there grass-roots support and interest, some key decision-makers were also starting to get involved. And finally and most importantly, there were increasing numbers of refugee children in our midst. There was no question that these children were learning to cope and adapt, at least on the surface. Some, with the support of insightful and caring teachers, had begun to share their stories and experiences, in a positive way, with their school communities. It was clear that we could learn from them and their families, and work with them to make it easier for them and for those who come after them.

Involvement of the Stakeholders

CSG members played an essential role in this research, both as a source of information and as a force in shaping the research process itself. For this reason, it was important to identify the backgrounds of the people who were members of the group

during the course of the research. They included:

-a refugee teacher from Bosnia who was coordinating the local Bosnian school, and who was extremely active with Bosnian refugees, particularly women and children;

-an ESL preschool coordinator from the WRDSB;

-two ESL teachers: the first worked in an elementary school that had one of the highest numbers of ESL children; this teacher initially worked on her own for many years, and more recently with others, to respond to the social, emotional, and mental health needs of her students; the second had worked as an itinerant ESL teacher in a number of elementary and senior public schools, and had extensive experience in group work and anti-racist education; both were involved with the EASC initiative;

-two health promotion officers from the Community Health Department: the first came to Canada as a refugee, had worked with refugees prior to and since his arrival, and had been actively involved in many community development initiatives in the multicultural community; the second, who replaced the first as a member of the committee, had extensive community experience in the area of cross-cultural and anti-racism work and was a graduate of the Community Psychology Program;

-a behavioural consultant from the WRDSB who had worked extensively with ESL children and their families;

-a settlement worker from the former Yugoslavia who had recently completed her Master of Arts in Community Psychology, and who did her thesis on issues of

children survivors; she also served as a community member on my thesis committee.

Two other members, a school host program coordinator and another ESL teacher, joined later on and participated in some aspects of the research.

At my request, the CSG agreed to play an advisory role in the research. As a result, I was able to weave my research into and around the work of the group. Essentially, this meant that I was able to:

-include relevant thesis issues as a normal part of our subcommittee's agenda;

-seek committee members' input on the values that should guide this research;

-consult them on the nature of the research questions;

-request their permission and assistance in documenting our work together, both by my journalling the internal workings of our group and by their participating in focus group interviews;

-invite any other ideas and suggestions that they might have that would contribute to the thesis.

Methods

Data Collection and Sampling Strategy

Since the research was process-oriented, I chose to use four qualitative research methods for data collection: journalling, key informant interviews, focus group interviews, and a document review. Copies of the guides for focus groups and for key informant group interviews appear in Appendices III and VII respectively. My overarching research question in all interviews was: How do we plan and develop school-

based community supports for refugee children? Within that large question I used probes or more specific questions about motivation, values and principles, resources, processes, partnerships, dynamics, documenting programs and indicators of success, and sustainability. Throughout the research process, I went back and forth between asking the "big question" and asking the smaller ones, trying to find the best approach. Reflections in my journal illustrate this search for the "best" approach:

> "At first I tried using the same big question that I had used with the focus group, followed by the probes. After doing this with A., I decided it was too general and that I needed to rely more on the more specific questions. So with B., I relied more on these but ended up with a very long interview, had to rush the last few questions, and didn't have time to ask the big one. Then with C., I stuck with specific questions and tried to open it up a little more but still ran out of time. Finally with D., I started with the big question, but she found it too overwhelming and had no idea where to start, so back I went to the specific questions again!" (Journal, April 14, 1998)

As Patton (1986) has explained, research focussed on process gathers detailed information from different perspectives to describe the design, development, and implementation of a program. The emphasis is on how the program or result is produced and seeks to understand the program's strengths and weaknesses, rather than measuring its impact.

Journalling

Given my closeness to the research topic and context, journalling was a logical choice as one method of data collection. Also known as keeping a log, journalling is a way in which researchers can chart the entire process of doing research. It is a chronological record of what they learn and their intuitions about how they learn it (Ely,

Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1993). A journal ideally includes the researcher's own hopes and fears, her self-doubts, uncertainties, emerging insights, and "ah-hahs!".

Putting my unformed ideas to paper helped me to capture them so they were not lost to future reflection. It was also a chance to begin to "work" and shape them. Since so much of what I hoped to learn came from the process of planning and developing a program with others, journalling offered an excellent way of chronicling and reflecting on this experience. At the beginning of the research, I obtained permission from CSG members to journal our experience together and encouraged them to share with me any insights they had about the process of planning and developing this program. As suggested by Ely et al. (1993), I recorded this on pages that had wide margins on either side. The main portion of the page contained a description of what was happening and my thoughts about it. One margin was to be for future thoughts I had about that section and the other was for recording, coding, categories, and themes during the analysis stage. Ultimately I only used one side since I didn't thoroughly reread my journal notes until doing the analysis. Any additional thoughts on an issue that I had, I just recorded chronologically in the main section of the journal.

Key Informant Interviews

I had planned to carry out two sets of interviews. The purpose of the first set was to gather information from a cross-section of different school community members at a particular elementary school. I called this school by the fictitious name of Greenvale Elementary School in order to protect the confidentiality of those whom I interviewed. Greenvale School had been involved in efforts to strengthen the links between the school

and its ESL population. This school had historically had the highest number of ESL children of any elementary school in the region. According to people to whom I spoke, the vast majority of them had refugee experience. Entry to the school was facilitated by the Greenvale ESL teacher who was also a member of the CSG. Although the focus of that school's work had not specifically been on refugee children, I anticipated that there would be many valuable insights that I could gain from their experience and apply to developing school-based community supports in a second school.

The second set of interviews was to be done in a second school with a similar cross-section of people and would have served as a process of reflection in planning and developing supports for refugee children in that school. I approached three schools about participating in this action research process and they all indicated that they were not prepared to be involved at that time. In consultation with my thesis advisor, I decided instead to do two more key informant interviews with people who were well-informed about different initiatives being taken in schools to address the needs of newcomer children, including refugees.

This inability to access a third school both for research purposes and in order to develop supports for refugee children was an excellent example of how timing and the social climate are huge determinants in the outcome of any initiative. I approached these three schools in April/May of 1998, probably too late in the school year for them to be getting involved in something new. Also, 1997/98 was part of an extremely difficult period for Ontario schools because of the massive cuts in funding, the introduction of a whole range of changes including new curricula, and the two-week province-wide protest

that shut down schools in October/November 1997.

In choosing participants for key informant interviews at Greenvale School, I used a purposeful sampling strategy in order to hear from different perspectives on the same issue. I interviewed an administrator, an ESL teacher, an ESL parent, a non-ESL parent, and a non-ESL teacher from the school who knew about the process but who had been less involved. I also used purposeful sampling in choosing the other two key informants in order to take advantage of two information-rich informants with whom I came in contact in the course of my research.

Focus Group Interviews

Two focus group interviews were conducted with the members of the CSG: one at the beginning of the research process and one at the end. The criterion for participating in the focus group interview was to be a member of the CSG, although I made an exception for one non-CSG person who was keenly interested in participating in the focus group. The purpose of the first focus group was to launch a process of reflection and documentation of the CSG's existing knowledge and experience related to the research questions. This provided an excellent opportunity for the group to think through issues related to developing supports for refugee children. In the week following the first CSG focus group, I conducted a joint interview using the same discussion guide with a CSG member and an ESL consultant, neither of whom had been able to attend in the designated focus group time.

The original purpose of the second focus group was to record the CSG's actual experience and insights into planning and developing a prevention program. Since the

CSG ultimately chose not to develop a specific program but to build supports, and since the work had not progressed as far as anticipated, the second focus group was used instead to share, verify, and elaborate on the initial findings of the research. This was an extremely valuable exercise, both for me as a researcher and for the work of the group. I was able to check out and deepen my understanding of key emerging themes and make links that I might otherwise have missed on my own. The group was able to hear in depth about my initial findings, voice some specific concerns about the need to bring this work into the "mainstream" and to work for systemic changes, and integrate their new knowledge into future plans.

I would be missing out on the "colour" of my focus group interviews, both of which were held at the home of one of the CSG members, if I didn't give some idea of the context in which these were held. A quote from my journal sets the scene and describes the value of the warm atmosphere in which the focus groups were held.

> "We arrived at dusk and drove up a hill into the woods. The setting for the focus group was nothing less than idyllic. The house was perched on the side of a hill in the woods, overlooking a wooded valley and the hills beyond. The sun was just setting as we arrived. When we entered, the table was set, the lights were low, a fire had been lit in a wood-burning stove, soft music was playing and C. was in a warmly-lit kitchen getting our potluck dinner organized. Wow! I'm sure this setting had a huge amount to do with the emotional ambiance that was established in the group and that carried on into the focus group meeting that followed our meal...The most striking thing that emerged was how much belonging to this group means to everyone involved...I felt there was a strong sense of positive energy, commitment, and camaraderie that emerged and developed throughout the evening." (Journal, February 10, 1998)

It wasn't until I began reading back over all the transcripts that I realized that the key theme of belonging that I learned was so important to the well-being of refugee children,

actually emerged in this very first interview, and was at the heart of the existence of the CSG itself.

Document Review

I reviewed and made notes on a number of written documents that I felt were important. Some were a source of information about the planning process, others contained direct quotes from refugees about their needs for support, and all were a valuable source of contextual information. They included minutes of our meetings during the period of the research, proceedings from our workshops, evaluation comments from our workshops, transcripts of seven presentations made to the WRDSB in support of ESL funding, and comments made by ESL students to teachers in eight different schools about what supports they felt were needed by refugee students.

Data Analysis and Verification

Throughout the research process, data were examined for meaning and interpretation and fed back to the CSG. I was continually listening for answers to the original research questions and for unanticipated insights that participants might offer. I transcribed all key informant interviews and focus group interviews verbatim. Far from finding this a tedious process, although I did find it very time-consuming, I loved revisiting the rich discussions I had with research participants. I recorded my thoughts about the value of this process in my journal:

> "Last night as I sat in the quiet of my attic, listening to people speak, the tone of their voices, their expression, their laughter and empathy, I felt I was hearing some people for the first time. These are people I have worked with for ages. But what came to me as I transcribed was how our own reactions to each other sometimes block out what we hear each other

> say...Transcribing these tapes has provided me as a community worker with an extra opportunity to really listen for meaning, which will help me in my work with this group." (Journal, February 10, 1998)

The process of inductive content analysis was used on both the journal, the transcribed interviews, and the transcripts of presentations to the WRDSB to identify, code and categorize primary patterns in the data (Patton, 1990). This involved reading through all the transcripts once, highlighting what appeared to be relevant information, and writing key words in the margins. Strauss and Corbin (1990) define this as open coding. On a separate sheet of paper, I also kept a running list of insights about emerging themes. I then scanned the margins and theme sheets, looking for the beginnings of patterns. I worked back and forth between the themes and the research questions to see what these might be. I then re-read all the transcripts again and began developing categories and codes, and marked these codes next to sections of texts throughout all the transcripts where they appeared. For example, "motivation" was a theme; "values" was a category; "diversity" was a subcategory; and "motivation/values/diversity" or "MVD" was the code. I kept a miscellaneous category open for data that seemed important but that I couldn't quite fit into the pattern. Finally, I reviewed all the categories and codes, merging those that fit together, and fitting the "miscellaneous" categories in where they made sense. Because of the volume of written material I had and the nature of the minutes and workshop proceedings, these other documents were used as a source of supplementary information and were not coded. I made notes about them and used them as a source of information about the planning process. However, I did code the presentations to the WRDSB since these contained valuable comments about the

importance of ESL teachers' support to refugee children.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline a number of criteria for establishing the trustworthiness of data. One is credibility or believability of the research. Activities that help to ensure credibility include prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation of data, member checking, and peer debriefing. Prior to my decision to undertake this research, I had been involved with this work for several years. My dual role as researcher and co-facilitator of the CSG allowed me much greater intimacy with and understanding of valuable information. My decision to use a journal to record this experience encouraged me to be a more persistent and systematic observer of the research and planning process. It was also a way of reminding me that, in addition to being a co-facilitator of the group, I was now also a researcher in this process. The different methods of data collection and the idea of intentionally seeking different perspectives in the key informant interviews helped to determine the convergence or triangulation of findings. While my dual role of researcher and co-facilitator had many advantages, it also had the potential of compromising the credibility of my results; there was always the possibility that I might not have seen something or might not have been open to different interpretations. In other words, I might have had "blind spots" because of my close involvement with the issue and the people. I believe that the close involvement of the CSG helped to ensure that the research process was open and honest, as did the fact that one of the thesis committee members was a CSG member. Preliminary results of the analysis were checked with most participants to see if they made sense and if there was anything missing. The final thing I did was to send a draft of the Results to all

participants with their personal quotes highlighted. They were asked to review this, with particular attention to their own quotes, and invited to give feedback by telephone or in writing. The final document incorporated their comments and revisions of their quotes.

Another of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for establishing trustworthiness of data is transferability. They state that, in order for qualitative research findings to be transferable to other settings, they must provide a thick, rich, and contextualized description that enables others to take from the research the findings that are most appropriate to their own settings. This was an important consideration in describing the historical and community context for the research and in using the Greenvale results in the form of a detailed case study. I realized that, given the way in which the data collection had changed to include only one school and the sheer volume of information I had collected, telling the Greenvale story would provide a more meaningful and understandable way for readers to learn about the results.

It is important to note here some of the challenges of the research process. For me, the hardest part of the research was to faithfully journal my observations and thoughts about this process. Although my journal was many pages long, there were gaps of weeks between some entries. This was partly due to the nature of working, parenting, and being a part-time student. However, it was also due to the fact that I had a dual role as researcher and co-facilitator of the CSG. While this dual role was largely an advantage in having a more intimate and in-depth knowledge and understanding of the data, it also meant that less defined research tasks, such as journalling, competed with work for the group. One of my greatest learnings from doing this thesis is the value of marrying

research with community work in an action-research process; however, the greatest challenge is to find an effective balance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rather than have separate Results and Discussion sections, I chose to integrate the two. I believe this avoids repetition and makes clearer, smoother links between the findings and my interpretation of them. The Results and Discussion section is divided into two parts: a case study of a particular school, and findings from all sources of my research.

The Greenvale Experience: A Case Study

Introduction

Writing up the experience of Greenvale Elementary School as a case study was an idea suggested to me by my thesis advisor when I was struggling with how to present my results. The more I thought about it, the more this idea made sense. I had conducted five of the seven key informant interviews with members from that school community, and other focus group members had continually referred to "the Greenvale experience." I decided that, in addition to being more interesting and understandable for the reader, presenting a large part of the results in a story format would provide a cohesive point of reference for other results of my research. It was also a way of validating the work done by members of that school community and others who worked to support them. My mind was made up while re-reading the transcript of an interview with a Greenvale School community member. I had asked him what advice he would have for another school interested in building school community supports for refugee children. He replied:

> "I would say to take the advice of Greenvale and take the research of what they have done and how they implemented their policies and programs. I would say that Greenvale could be an example for all the school communities that have refugees."

That settled it for me. I decided to tell the Greenvale story.

The Context

Greenvale is an elementary school of approximately 600 children. Up until about 10 years ago, most of its student population was made up of white, Canadian-born children from middle-income, Anglo-Saxon backgrounds. With the construction of several low-income, three and four-bedroom townhouse complexes, and the presence of several lower-cost apartment buildings, more and more of the immigrant and refugee families coming to Kitchener moved to the area and the number of newcomer children attending Greenvale Public School began to grow. At the time of the research, 139 children were receiving ESL instruction from four full-time ESL teachers in the school. This did not include the number of immigrant and refugee children who were still in the school but no longer need ESL support. According to one key informant, almost all of the children she taught had refugee experience. The changing context within and around Greenvale school reflects the changing demographics of Waterloo Region, as documented in the literature review.

Milestones in the Story

While individual ESL teachers at Greenvale were continually reaching out to newcomer children and their families, the broader effort by others in the school to do this began about five years ago. The School Council initiated measures to encourage more

participation from ESL parents. Several reasons were cited as motivating this outreach:

> "They found that when a school-trip permission form went home, it was always the ESL kids that didn't bring them back. When volunteers were needed in the school, the ESL parents weren't volunteering."

> "I felt, O.K., let's find out about these people, let's find out why these kids aren't in school, let's not label them. I hear so much of that on the playground...So-called white Anglo-Saxon people have a tendency to be bigoted when it comes to people of different cultures and colours and that hurts me a great deal...I want these children to be given a fair chance...As parents in a heavily multicultural school, we have to learn more about their cultures."

At about the same time, officials of the WRDSB were concerned about attendance issues at a senior school. As one key informant explained, the school social worker who was asked to address the problem...

> "...did an incredible job of saying, 'O.K., we can deal with this one particular situation, or we can deal with what the real problem is, and that's racism.' She just had this vision of people coming together to look at racism in the school system, and how we can work together to benefit all the kids."

It was out of this vision that the EASC was formed, bringing together teachers, school counsellors, the ESL consultant, settlement workers from the community, and others to form a coalition between the school system and community agencies to address this issue. Two key informants who were involved with the EASC initiative explained why the Coalition had chosen to work with Greenvale School:

> "My memory is that one of the reasons we chose Greenvale was that it had one of the highest ESL populations, plus it had a friendly principal who was willing to work with us without feeling attacked and criticized that his school had problems."

From my research and the literature on human ecology (Juras et al., 1997; Kloos et

al., 1997; Trickett, 1994; 1997), several factors emerged as significant in transforming the ESL teachers' individual efforts to reach ESL families into a school-wide initiative. The first was the increasing numbers of ESL families in the school. The second was the difficulty of communicating with ESL parents across a language barrier. The third was the lack of involvement of ESL parents in the school, either as volunteers or as participants in information and education evenings. The fourth was the decision taken by members of the School Council to reach out to ESL parents. And finally, the fifth was the interest of an outside group in supporting the school and lending valuable resources to this outreach effort.

One of the first things the School Council did in order to improve basic communication between ESL parents and the school was to set up an informal translation system. Several parents who spoke other languages were recruited to translate for non-English speaking parents on a volunteer basis. As one key informant explained, this system was limited to communicating basic information to parents:

> "We didn't use this system to call in parents to talk about issues we had with their kids, it was generally if forms went home. There was one parent for whom this system worked very well. We paired her up with a parent who spoke Spanish...every time a paper came home with her kid, it often went home to the translator, so she could phone him...he would have the paper and he could explain it to her."

Working together, Greenvale and the EASC decided that the next step in trying to strengthen two-way communication between ESL homes and the school should be an ESL parents night. About 50 to 60 parents from the four largest linguistic communities represented in the school - Vietnamese, Serbo-Croatian, Somali, and Spanish -

participated in an evening meeting designed to hear their questions and concerns. Parents were grouped according to their common language. Each group had a facilitator/interpreter to chair the discussion and provide interpretation between parents and English-speaking school staff and community members. Parents raised issues that were of concern to them and school staff circulated between the groups to listen and answer questions. This meeting was mentioned several times by different key informants from Greenvale and members of the focus groups as a very successful event, and one that should be repeated annually. Several factors were identified as contributing to its success:

> "We had the ISAP (Immigrant Settlement and Adaptation Program) settlement workers come out. They phoned everyone to invite them to come and confirm with them on the phone in their first language that they would come...They also knew some of these people from being settlement workers, so that was a really nice connection."

> "You could see once they were able to speak in their own languages, then all of a sudden all this stuff came out and there was really good debate going back and forth...They were very comfortable with their friends and their peers who were able to speak the same language and understand each other...People didn't hold back because they weren't sure how to put that particular phrase or word."

Clearly the ISAP workers played a valuable role in the success of this meeting. The fact that they spoke to all the parents in their own language to personally invite them to the meeting and explain its purpose had a very positive impact on the number of parents who attended. ISAP staff were familiar with and trusted by both ESL parents and school staff because of their previous work with the two groups. They enabled parents to express themselves in their own language, resulting in a richer two-way dialogue. The group

experience was a more comfortable and empowering one for parents who would normally have met one-on-one with teachers and spoken either in limited English or through an interpreter. Finding new ways to reach out and build trust with people who may feel marginalized and disempowered is an essential first step in building effective and enduring community partnerships for social change (Labonté, 1993).

Another frequently-mentioned milestone in the Greenvale experience grew out of the ESL Parents' Night. Popularly known as "the Somali Tea Party," this social event was organized by an English-speaking Somali parent on Greenvale's School Council. He was also a key member of his community and had a strong commitment to building two-way communication and understanding between the school and ESL parents.

> "I was trying to get the school staff and population to understand the culture and environment of the refugees...I was also trying to encourage the refugee parents to get involved in their children's education and their children's school... On one occasion, I have arranged a meeting for the Somali parents... I asked the School Council if they could endorse it and they did, and I told them, 'You need to meet these people. You only see them with the big clothing going around...but inside this big clothing there is a person like you whom you need to understand and talk to.'...And I talked to the Somali ladies. I told them, 'People only see a tent moving and they cannot understand what is inside, whether you have the same feelings as them. You have to come out.' And several of the ladies were fluent in English and they expressed themselves. And they [Somali parents and school staff] loved each other!"

The Somali community chose to hold this event, not at the school, but at a community centre in their own neighbourhood near which many of them lived. The children were delighted to see that their teachers had come into their neighbourhood to meet with their parents. In this fun and informal atmosphere, people felt comfortable discussing sensitive topics related to cultural practices that they would not otherwise have mentioned. They

also talked about daily routines and discovered that they had much in common. Virtually everyone that I interviewed from Greenvale commented positively about the way in which this activity not only strengthened communication but also helped to build a sense of community (Sarason, 1998) for those who participated and those who learned about it. This event illustrated the value of having people from newcomer communities who are willing and able to help bridge the gap between schools and newcomers, an observation that I did not encounter in the literature.

Creative Initiatives From the Greenvale Experience

Many different initiatives were taken by Greenvale school community members to welcome newcomers into the school, create a sense of belonging and mutual respect within this increasingly culturally diverse community, and deal sensitively but firmly with racist incidents at the school when they occur. I have written about them in detail here since they provide a rich source of ideas for others working to accomplish similar outcomes. To help make sense of them, I have categorized them as initiatives for: a) outreach, b) inclusion, c) respect, and d) creating a safe, supportive, anti-racist environment. Some fit into more than one of these.

Although these initiatives may seem similar, to me they were related but distinct stages in a continuum. I have provided definitions for each to show why I developed separate categories for them. I understood outreach to be deliberate actions taken by ESL teachers and others to reach out to newcomer parents who would otherwise have remained quite isolated from the school. It often involved going outside of the school and into the community to reach parents. Inclusion was an approach that I believe was used to

involve newcomer children and their parents once the initial contact had been made. For me, it meant changing the way the school normally did things or adding in new things, so that newcomers could "see themselves" reflected in the school's culture. Respect was a more advanced step on the continuum and involved an attitudinal change that went beyond merely tolerating differences to accepting and even valuing them. And finally, creating a safe and supportive environment meant that systemic changes were being made, such as building in special flexibility and supports for newcomer children, and systematically addressing racist incidents and practices within the school.

Outreach

I learned the greatest contact with and outreach to newcomer children was through ESL teachers. One by one, ESL teachers built relationships with the children and their parents, as this key informant explained:

> "I remember a Principal from a school coming to our community meeting. He was extremely frustrated because he hadn't been able to get any parents from any of the ethnocultural communities to be on the School Council. And he said to me, 'How do you get these parents on the council?' And I said, 'It's a one-to-one relationship that you build with people...You show them that you're sincere and that they're valued, and that they're going to be listened to and that there's trust there.' "

The same ESL teacher talked about how much it helped to be invited to visit families in their homes:

> "When I eat their parents' food, or I come to their home, or their parent comes to me, or I phone on a Saturday, I think it's a different sort of a relationship than the very formal 'school/teacher/power' and parent relationship."

Since most teachers didn't have time for a lot of home visiting, some made a point of

being available out on the playground or in the halls, when parents brought their children to school. Especially for parents whose English was limited and who might have been intimidated by our school system, this more informal approach made it easier for them to talk to teachers and for teachers to gain valuable insights into the children's backgrounds.

This same theme of informality and personal contact was echoed in what Greenvale had learned about how to get ESL parents out to meetings. A former member of the EASC reflected on what he had learned from trying to reach out to ESL parents at Greenvale.

> "If we communicate by form letters, even written in their languages, there's a certain group that are illiterate in their first language. They're not going to understand what's going on. And we really found that word-of-mouth is the best way and we had results then."

The important role of the teacher in outreach, inclusion, and empowerment is echoed in Delgado-Gaitan's study (1991) of a California school's initiative to involve Spanish-speaking parents in the children's schooling. She found that unconventional, informal, but intentional outreach on the part of teachers led parents to gain the trust, confidence, and knowledge of the school system that they needed to participate more fully in their children's education.

Inclusion

One of the things mentioned by virtually every key informant or focus group member who had contact with Greenvale was the excellent work done to welcome families from diverse backgrounds, to create a sense of belonging, and to adapt the school's routines so that they felt included in the school community. For me the most

eloquent voice was that of an ESL parent who not only described some of the initiatives the school used but also the impact this welcoming environment had on children and parents alike.

> "You walk in Greenvale, in the hallways, and there are so many different languages [placards with the word 'welcome' translated] and flags that are hanging around...when you see your language you feel that you belong...In every religious celebration or holiday, Greenvale announces that morning that it is a religious holiday for that group. The child goes home and tells the parents...she feels that she is part of the community."

As another key informant explained, Greenvale also used its newsletter to educate mainstream parents about the school's increasing diversity and to communicate to newcomer parents that the school was concerned about their issues. In talking about two articles he had reprinted from the Globe and Mail about the positive impact of immigrants, he said:

> "You know, we're trying to get these out to the parents to let them [mainstream parents] know we have a mixed neighbourhood. And I mentioned in this last one about fighting in Yugoslavia, I try to keep on the fact that we're in sympathy with their [ESL parents] concerns."

In another issue of the newsletter, an ESL teacher had obtained permission from a refugee child to print a story from her experience of war in her country. Simply told in the words of a nine-year old girl, this brief anecdote provided the school community with a valuable insight into the previous lives of many of the refugee students among them.

School assemblies also created opportunities to recognize the diverse experiences of Greenvale's population and to increase awareness among mainstream children and adults. An administrator recalled some alternative programs he had helped organize for Remembrance Day ceremonies at the school.

> "I wrote a skit on landmines and got some kids together to put it on...This woman comes home to her husband and children and says, 'I just got a bonus from my work, so we're going to be able to go to Disney Land after all.' Then we cut to a scientist, he's talking about landmines and how they work and what they do, and how they maim more than kill. Then cut to a businessman who says, 'Look, I don't particularly like landmines but people want them, so I sell them.' Then cut to a factory worker who says, 'Look, I'd rather build bicycles, but there are no bike factories hiring people, so I build landmines.' In the end, everyone cops out...The previous one, I got [the ESL teacher] to help the kids record their experiences with the war. We wrote them up and each read the experience of another [because it was too painful and stigmatizing for the children to read their own]. And people were very moved by this. In the end, war is all about families and children. And these are the children in this school who've experienced these things."

Clearly these were activities that needed to be handled with a lot of sensitivity and support and with no pressure on children to participate unless they wished. In some cases, the stories had emerged spontaneously in the ESL classroom and then a discussion had developed around the possibility of sharing them with the larger school community.

The literature highlights the importance of similar strategies for inclusion and mentions the positive impact they have on creating a positive, supportive atmosphere for children from diverse backgrounds. In his ethnography of a culturally diverse urban American high school and its experience with a multicultural program, Jacob (1995) notes that the program's most striking aspect was the close-knit, communal learning environment that it created. In describing what this meant to students, Jacob's research participants used words such as "confidence," "voice," "self-esteem," "comfort," and "safety." Kaprielian-Churchill and Churchill (1994) confirm the important role the school can play in helping students and families to harmonize their cultures of origin with that of their host country.

Respect

Several people remarked that, for them, the proper pronunciation and use of a person's full name was a significant act of conveying respect:

> "This particular girl came to me in tears. She said, 'They make fun of my name'. So I went down and spoke to the class. I said, 'This is D. It is not A., or anything else, it is her name, and it is her. It is personal to her, just as your name is your identity. And when you mock a person's name, you're mocking that person. If I hear that one of you kids is mispronouncing her name deliberately, you'll be heading down the road.' "

This anecdote illustrated how important it was for those in authority to be addressing issues like this. When an administrator spoke to an entire class, it sent a clear message to the children and the school about the norms of respectful behaviour. It also reassured other children who may have been experiencing a similar problem that support was there for them if they needed it.

Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment

A simple but effective strategy that I learned about from Greenvale key informants was the first-language buddy system. When children came to the school speaking limited English, an attempt was made to pair them up with someone who spoke their first language and more fluent English. The newcomer children were given permission, when they had a problem understanding, to leave the classroom at any time to find their first-language buddy and ask for help. This helped children overcome their fears about not understanding or being misunderstood.

The most significant factor in newcomer children's safety was the issue of racism. At Greenvale, the teachers, parents, and administrators whom I interviewed, indicated that

they didn't feel that there were many racist incidents in the school and that they were happy with the way in which they are handled. According to one key informant from Greenvale, there were several basic elements to their approach: incidents were followed up on immediately and directly; they started from the assumption that the incident was rooted in ignorance and that children needed to learn how their comments or behaviour had hurt someone else; and they made sure that the parents of the children involved were informed about the incident and how it was handled.

> "We get at it fast. When the kids make comments, they're usually innocently made. For instance, this girl was crying because this kid said, 'You look like chocolate milk.' So I talked to the other kid and I said, 'You really hurt her feelings when you did that.' And the kid was really shocked that he'd hurt her feelings. And that was it. I tell them, 'I'm here to educate you. I'm not interested in yelling at you, I'm interested in telling you about the world. Maybe you've not experienced much, but some people have had terrible experiences, because of the colour of their skin or the way their hair is or their religion. They get beaten up and killed and stuff like that. We don't want this anymore.' I communicated to the other child's parents that this had taken place, and they were happy I'd dealt with it."

This same key informant spoke of another more serious incident involving another parent and a child that was effectively handled using the same approach.

> "At another school we had an incident where there was a guy threatening to kill a kid. So I went down there to the office. What had happened was, the previous day, this little kid in Grade One who was [of a particular background] had spilled his drink box on this guy's son. And the guy said, 'Look, [back home] we were totally under the control of [the group from which this child had come]. And I'm not putting up with it any more.' I said, 'Hold it. You come here to start a new life. The family of the other kid has come here to start a new life. These kids have no agenda. You have an agenda. These other parents may have an agenda. But if you start passing it on to these kids, you're doing your kid no favour, and you're going to have the police down your back. And you'll probably be deported.' So he cooled down and he started to get perspective on it. I

said, 'Kids in Grade One are not bigots and racists unless you've made them so. They come to school and they make mistakes. Those juice boxes, I jab the straw in and it shoots right out on me.' So you know, we solved that, we didn't call anybody, we called the other parents and they were happy with it and I think we did a job of educating that parent."

Although the Greenvale key informants were positive about the way in which racist incidents were handled, these same people cited examples of systemic racism such as a lack of racial and ethnocultural diversity in staffing and entrenched attitudes that worked against the children. This same distinction between racist incidents and systemic racism is made by Mukherjee (1992). Overt behaviours such as racist slurs, jokes, name-calling, innuendos, and acts of physical and emotional violence are categorized as racist incidents. Systemic racism tends to be expressed in more covert or seemingly innocent actions which include being centred out or ignored, labelled as a troublemaker, and subjected to differential expectations and treatment. Mukherjee points out that, while overt racist incidents are very hurtful, it is the more subtle systemic racism that affects people's life chances, often in ways that are difficult to pinpoint and change.

One participant concurred with the distinction between racist incidents and systemic racism. She felt that there were now fewer racist incidents in the school and that they were well handled by the school, especially the administration. However, she believed that systemic racism in the form of attitudes, comments said in an undertone, expectations of children, and assumptions about certain groups, had not changed that much, as these comments illustrated:

> "When you see the class pictures in Greenvale, you see the change of faces, more and more and more. But when you take the faces of the staff, there has never been any change...there has to be a reflection of the different

cultures that we are in this city."

> "At [names the school], we had a teacher assigned to us from [names the background]. So when word came she was coming to our school, several people said, 'Oh my God, they're sending a [derogatory name] in here! And I suppose she'll be wearing a sari!'...I have a supply teacher who is of [a particular] background that I get in as much as I can, so the kids can see role models. But it's still entrenched."

Although there was still work to be done at this level, Greenvale had earned a reputation for being a school that had done a lot to create a welcoming, inclusive and respectful environment for newcomer families:

> "One family moved out of our area. They experienced a great deal of what they called 'racism' at their new school. They phoned our school to see if the children could come back because they were out of our area. Although the parent was willing to drive the children, they weren't allowed to come back. So they moved back to our area, so that their children could return to our school! So things like that are good indicators to me that we're on the right track as far as making it a safe, inclusive environment for everyone."

Summary

Although the focus of the Greenvale experience was not been specifically on meeting the needs of refugee children, I learned that the impact of their work had been to create the kind of safe and supportive environment that is essential for the healing and well-being of refugee children. This is congruent with Kuh's (1993) findings that school climate and culture have a major impact on student learning and personal development. Most of the work the school had done in this area cost little or nothing to implement and relied mainly on increased awareness, sensitivity, and a willingness to see and do things differently. It had grown out of the school's increasing experience with refugee and

immigrant children, their families, and the individual and collective efforts of school staff, parents, and community agencies.

Beyond learning about successful activities and approaches that this school implemented, my most important finding from the Greenvale experience had to do with universality and belonging. In keeping with what I had read in the literature (Johnson et al., 1997; Kloos et al., 1997), I discovered that working with the entire ESL population is a way of providing supports for refugee children without stigmatizing and revictimizing them. Kloos et al. assert that it is better to design programs for an entire class to normalize a problem that "at-risk" children may be facing. Johnson et al. propose a primary prevention model that is typically directed to large numbers of students and that is generic enough to apply to diverse racial, ethnic, and age groups. They also suggest that an indirect approach that works with the school environment benefits all children in the school, not just those for whom the intervention was initially intended.

I further learned that having a sense of safety is the most crucial element in the healing of refugee children. Feeling safe is linked to a sense of belonging; therefore, creating an environment in which refugee children feel that they belong is the most helpful thing a school can do to support refugee children. It was the following explanation from an ESL parent that first helped me to understand this:

> "Most of the refugee children have left a situation where they were excluded and that's what made them refugees. And when they come to an environment that's inclusive, that's what makes the difference. That lets them forget. For example, in terms of my kids, they left [names country of origin, that experienced civil war] and lived in [names country of refuge]. But the environment was not their environment. Being [names nationality and religion], they have been harassed, abused, tortured on several

> occasions. That's part of the battle that made them refugees. When they came to Canada, they found that nobody was bothering them about the way they dress or the way they look or their identity. They were accepted when they came to Greenvale, they found their language and the flag, and the religious holidays which they would identify with...In an environment where you are excluded you are not safe, you do not feel safe. In an environment where you are included, you feel safe."

While this is unfortunately not the experience of all refugee children when they come to Canada, nevertheless, it is an eloquent testimonial to the importance of creating a safe, accepting environment.

Findings from all Sources

In addition to what I described in the Greenvale Case Study, I acquired a wealth of knowledge about planning and developing school-based community supports from the focus groups and the other two key informants that I interviewed. Reporting and discussion of these findings is organized under the following four major headings: a) Motivation, Values, and Principles, b) Resources, c) Processes, Partnerships, and Dynamics, and d) and Sustainability. These headings derive from my four research questions which were:

1. What values motivate people to become involved in developing support programs for refugee children? What principles are important in guiding the process?
2. What human and material resources are needed?
3. What processes, partnerships, and dynamics are involved and what is their impact?
4. What positive changes are anticipated? How and why should they be documented or measured? What has to happen for the process to continue over the long term?

Due to the volume of data and a desire not to overwhelm the reader, I tried to limit more detailed discussion to what I consider the key points. Some research results - for example,

those related motivation, values, and principles - are reported and discussed from two perspectives: learnings about the work of the CSG, and learnings about building school-based community supports for refugee children.

Motivation, Values, and Principles: The Foundation for Change

In thinking about the process of change, I wanted to learn what has motivated people to become involved in building school-based community supports for refugee children, and what values and principles are important in guiding this process.

Motivation

I found that the primary motivators are empathy, values and principles, and enlightened self-interest.

Personal empathy. Everyone with whom I spoke had some personal experience that led them to identify and empathize with refugee children. Three people mentioned that their parents had come to Canada as refugees, and this had an impact on their families. Two had come as refugees themselves, others as immigrants; so they knew first-hand the challenges of being different and not belonging. As one participant explained:

> "I come from a family with a lot of experience in concentration camps and both sides of my family losing everybody. The denial that was in my family and just recognizing that, and how much it really ruined and created a lot of problems...So I think there's a real importance in getting past denial and moving forward in terms of these issues and seeing the incredible strengths that people have and moving toward a healthier place around dealing with trauma."

Another participant talked about his direct experience with refugees and how he was motivated both by a desire to share his knowledge and to change the system, as well as by the pain of knowing that he had left a situation in which others still had to live.

> "Before I came here, I had the opportunity to work in a refugee camp, so when I came here, and I started working with refugees, it wasn't that difficult for me to know how they felt...I knew cases that were referred to some counsellors and it was a failure...sometimes it was the language, but even people who spoke the language were also a little lost on how to work with these people...To keep involved here is a way of paying my debt with those who are still there, suffering."

Shared values and principles. Shared values and principles emerged as the source of passion for those involved in this work and the glue which binds people together. This was mentioned by most participants in the research but was particularly striking during the first focus group which involved members of the CSG. People commented that being part of this group helped break down their sense of isolation, provided opportunities to learn from others, and empowered them to take on difficult issues.

> "I feel a real need to be in groups such as this one where common values are shared, because on a constant basis I come to situations where I have to deal with some serious barriers, mostly from institutions. And there is very little support from my own organization, so to be involved in a group like this with people who experience similar things in their own settings, it's such a relief."

Other participants mentioned how important it was for them that the group is open, inclusive, and welcoming. They also felt that not only was their work valued, but that they were cared about by other group members. Given that many group members participated on at least some, if not all, of their own time, it was essential for them to feel that they get something back from their involvement.

> "For me it was very hard to join this group. As one of the torture survivors I thought, 'You can't understand me. What should I do, and how can people understand me?' And when I came back home I was thinking, 'Should I go again?' But I grow up as a member of the group, and I was thinking how each member became so valuable to me. And I feel that I am a part of one body and that body needs me in some way."

This finding, that shared values and principles are strong motivators for those involved in social interventions such as this, is supported by the literature on community coalitions (Butterfoss et al., 1993), partnerships (Labonté, 1993; MacGillivary et al., 1998), empowerment (Lord & Hutchison, 1993), and school interventions (Cherniss, 1991; Cherniss, 1997; Gager & Elias, 1996; Juras et al., 1997; Kloos et al., 1997; Weinstein et al., 1991). Butterfoss points out that "the spirit of cooperation, forged at the formation stage, may be the most important reason why coalitions become cohesive and effective" (p. 321). A core of shared values is seen by Labonté as a primary ingredient in building partnerships for community enhancement. In the same way that empowerment is essential to the well-being of disadvantaged people (Lord & Hutchison, 1993), CSG members expressed their need to work in solidarity with like-minded people in order to feel empowered to make change. This need for solidarity in addressing the challenges of working a bureaucratic environment such as a school is stressed by Cherniss (1991) and Weinstein et al. (1991). Cherniss also makes the point that teachers tend to be particularly committed to interventions when there is a good "fit" between the program and their values and beliefs, and when they have a sense that change is possible.

Enlightened self-interest. Two participants recognized the fact that we are all part of the same community, both within the school and in the larger community, and that our children, schools, and communities will be affected if we don't provide the necessary supports for refugee children now.

Guiding Values and Principles

In addition to values and principles being part of what motivates people to become

involved in this work, there was a strong feeling that certain values and principles should underlie and guide the work of building supports for refugee children. As in the work of Prilleltensky et al. (1997), the key values that emerged from the research were: diversity; respect and dignity; sense of community and belonging; participation; caring and compassion; and social justice. A significant new learning that was revealed to me through my research was the primary importance, particularly to refugee families, of a sense of community and belonging. There are many references throughout the literature about the importance of building a sense of community (Labonté, 1993; MacGillivary et al., 1998; Pilisuk et al., 1996; Prilleltensky et al., 1997; Sarason, 1988); however, participants in my research highlighted the essential link between the trauma of refugeeism - of being cast out by one society in which they are deemed to no longer "belong" - and the need to feel accepted for who they are in their new community. Without rebuilding this trust and new sense of community, all other efforts to build supports for refugee children and their families will be on shaky ground.

Guiding principles that emerged from the research as a whole and that confirmed the Greenvale experience were: a) nurture caring, compassionate relationships based on trust and mutual respect; b) build inclusive, welcoming, and diverse communities; c) work from a holistic, multilevel, health-oriented perspective; d) challenge accepted assumptions and ways of doing things; e) use a community development approach based on expressed needs, equitable participation, and empowerment; f) work for systemic change; and g) practise what you preach.

During the final focus group with CSG members, one of the participants asked me

how I would define "values" and "principles." When I use the term values, I am talking about ideals within people and societies that shape how they feel about what's truly important in their lives. Caring, kindness, and honesty are examples of values that shape people's behaviour from the inside out. When I talk about principles, I think about guidelines that can serve as an external reference point for our behaviour. Principles are often articulated rules that grow out of our values and shape how we act, particularly in relation to the world around us. Examples would be "Honesty is the best policy" or "Treat others as you wish to be treated." Since many of the values are at the heart of more than one principle and some have been explicitly integrated into the principles articulated above, I will include comments about values as part of reporting on research results related to the principles.

Nurture caring relationships. Within the CSG and in its work with refugee families, taking the time to build strong, caring relationships based on trust and mutual respect was clearly an essential ingredient for success. My journal notes reflected how taking time for relationships had built commitment, increased group effectiveness, and allowed for the resolution of conflicts that had originally threatened to split the group.

> "All of the tension that interfered between us for so long has been replaced with a warm sense of belonging and supportiveness...There is a lot of trust within the group, now that we have worked through the tensions."

This finding is confirmed by the literature on partnerships and coalitions. Butterfoss et al. (1993) conclude that positive relationships among members tend to create a productive atmosphere for the group's work.

Relationship-building was also an effective strategy for involving refugee parents in

the school.

> "This one woman, when she was asked why she came, she said, 'Diane the ESL teacher told me to be here (laughing) and she used to help me so much and we had fun together..."

One refugee participant pointed out that in relationships based on mutual respect, newcomers have the sense that they have something to contribute that others value.

> "She stressed how important it is for immigrants and refugees to have a sense that they can give back to their host country, and to feel that what they have to contribute is valued. This is important for their self-esteem and helps them have a sense that they belong."

When parents who have felt excluded and undervalued receive the message that they do indeed have something important to contribute, they feel empowered to participate in their children's school life (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Kloos et al., 1997).

Build inclusive communities. Belonging to an inclusive, welcoming, and diverse community was another key principle for many participants. Within the CSG, this involved feeling that different points of view were listened to, accepted, and appreciated, and that new people from different backgrounds were welcomed. One participant explained why this is so important:

> "When I worked with the Race Relations Committee, I met people who were much older than me that were from totally different cultures...Even though there were clashes and problems, we were able to focus it from a point of view of diversity...And I think those are important values that we should transfer to whatever we do in the schools."

Valuing diverse and inclusive communities means recognizing that people have the right to define their own personal and social identity. It is linked to their sense of self-determination (MacGillivary et al., 1998). The benefits of individuals and communities

being able to define themselves, without fear of oppression or discrimination, has been documented by a number of studies (Beiser et al., 1995; Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994; Trickett & Birman, 1994). I found this principle was particularly important to people working with refugee children in school settings, as mentioned in the case study, since a sense of belonging and safety were found to be integrally linked.

Work from a holistic, multilevel, health-oriented perspective. Throughout the research, participants referred to the need to use a holistic perspective in building supports for refugee children. This involves taking into consideration all the things that might affect their lives: their family situation; their living conditions; their health; life stages they are going through; their relationships on the playground and in the neighbourhood; their progress in the classroom; and their previous experiences before coming to Canada (Beiser et al., 1995; Garbarino, 1992; Garmezy, 1987; Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994: Rutter, 1983; Williams, 1991). For this reason, it is also important to use a multilevel approach in planning to respond to their needs (Bogenschneider, 1996). People at different levels need to participate, including parents, teachers, administrators, other members of their communities, other children, and resource people from community agencies, to name a few. In describing her interest in the CSG, one focus Group member described what this approach meant to her:

> "What I really liked about this group is that part of its philosophy is that it really wants to look at the different perspectives of how to deal with issues, bringing people together from different communities or different community settings."

Within the CSG, there was a strong commitment to build on children's strengths,

resilience, and natural capacity to heal. More recent literature on primary prevention has been promoting interventions that enhance "the self-righting nature of human development" (Benard, 1993, p.44; Bogenschneider, 1996; Johnson et al.,1997). These authors conclude that it is important to work with and strengthen the characteristics and circumstances of children that foster health and coping. In writing specifically about immigrant and refugee children, Beiser et al. (1995) indicate the need for a strong and comfortable ethnocultural identity as a major factor in children's self-esteem, and consequently, their resilience. This was echoed by one of the research participants who had refugee experience.

This health-oriented theme was emphasized in two CSG workshops and resulted in teachers mirroring back their experiences and stories of resilience in their students. One teacher spoke about a child who had confided the horrific story of her mother and brother dying in her arms. The teacher marvelled that, in spite of her sadness, the child was also able to radiate joy to those around her. In many informal and unrecorded conversations, CSG members affirmed their belief that starting from the assumption of illness is disempowering, that it revictimizes and stigmatizes refugee children, whereas building from children's strengths and capacities on the assumption of health, celebrates and reinforces their resilience.

Challenge assumptions. A number of participants recognized the need to continually challenge assumptions and accepted ways of doing things as the first step in bringing about fundamental change. Among the assumptions that they identified as needing to be challenged were such things as the use of time, the need for more money,

the way in which priorities are defined, and approaches to reaching and communicating with diverse groups of people. For example, one participant in particular strongly asserted that teachers have to challenge their own, as well as the system's, beliefs about time, or nothing will change.

> "It's very hard to say 'no' to things that you're supposed to be doing, or to creatively use that time, but I think that we have to do that, and not just say that we don't have the time, because we *can* do it...it's like freeing ourselves from mental slavery...[and not saying] 'That's just the way it is.' Because it's never going to change if we have that attitude."

Listening and paying attention to what people tell us they need, taking risks, and stepping outside our "comfort zone" were all identified as necessary steps in the process of change. The literature on working with immigrants, refugees, and disadvantaged peoples offers some other helpful ideas of how to ensure that we are not working from false assumptions. Becoming more knowledgable about refugeeism, Canadian refugee policies, and the common cultural beliefs and practices of different ethnocultural groups can help prevent mistaken assumptions (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994; Silka & Tip, 1994). Identifying needs, developing responses, implementing programs, and evaluating outcomes all require the full participation of our priority population partners (MacGillivary et al., 1998).

Use a community development approach. Respondents spontaneously and explicitly named community development as a key approach to building supports for refugee children. Some described community development initiatives in which they had been involved that they felt contributed to building these community supports. Elements of the community development approach that participants highlighted as important in this

particular context were the need to start from people's expressed needs, the importance of maintaining contact with people at the "grass-roots," and the importance of process goals such as equitable participation and empowerment of community members.

An anecdote from the Greenvale experience illustrates the importance of starting from needs that people in the community have defined for themselves.

> "One of the issues that was generated by newcomer parents was the whole issue of safety of the kids going to and from school. It's quite a busy street and also there was some bullying going on, and a lot of parents were quite concerned about it...We thought they should know about the Ontario school system. But they wanted to talk about safety - are their kids safe coming to school and going home. So that's what we talked about, and we had a good turn out and interest in that discussion."

Working to ensure that people understand how the school system operates and know how to participate in shaping it to meet their needs (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991) was specifically mentioned by at least three participants as an important part of the community development process. As one person explained,

> "We have to have a clear understanding of what it means to participate in our society, and how we can help people get from where they're at to here. And I think this is a real weak area right now. To give you an example, there is a kid from [names country] that I've been working with who is running into a lot of difficulties at school at the Grade Three level, and now things are becoming a crisis...I went to the home and it was absolutely bare...except for the television, which was probably seen from 3:30 to midnight...Mum didn't have an educational background herself, didn't know how to value education or how to support her child's education...So here the educators have their values and what they want to see, Mum thinks her child's doing just fine, and he's not...And I think sometimes there's reluctance to let families really know what is needed or let kids really know what is needed."

This story was told to me to show how hard it is to balance respect for what children and parents think with the need for them to learn how to adapt and succeed in this society.

The story also illustrates the challenging role schools have to play, not only in academic education but also in social education (Johnson et al.,1997; Kloos et al., 1997; Trickett & Birman, 1989). This is particularly true for refugee children. As the first institution which they encounter in Canada, it acts as an instrument for fostering social learning and mobility, stability, and general well-being (Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994).

The work of one key informant who has facilitated groups of ESL children reflected some of the key aspects of using a community development approach.

> "The equity groups I've done...are more diverse groups: race, language, whatever background. The goal of those groups is to look at making the school community a safer, better place for all people. But where I'd want to go with it, is to bridge - and it's started happening naturally - to the community. So that in [names school], that had a girls' group, there were a lot of problems with racism in the community...so the girls invited someone from the [neighbourhood association] to talk about the issues. It extended out into the community...so that it doesn't remain an isolated girls' group at school but could take root in that community to look at racism. [The impact of these groups is] empowerment, feeling strong, feeling good, that they can overcome things, that they have connections with other kids, that sense of belonging. It doesn't work for all kids, but it's pretty strong, pretty powerful."

This same informant continually emphasized that working to build safe, inclusive communities is important for all children, not just refugee children, a point that will be elaborated later in this thesis.

Work for systemic change. Another principle that emerged from both focus groups and key informant interviews was the need to work for fundamental changes in the systems that govern schools, the community, and society as a whole. As one focus group member asserted,

> "People really do get into that victim kind of thing, like, 'We have to help

> these poor people.' Whereas the real issue is the systemic racism and the systemic barriers. So we need to remember to keep that focus, that the real changes that have to occur here are changes in the system and not changes with people, or with all the people in the system."

Practise what you preach. Members of both focus groups and key informant interviews mentioned the importance of living by the values and principles that they had articulated. "Practise what you preach" was a particularly important principle for CSG members, who felt that they were not only trying to establish community supports in school settings but also within their own group:

> "Actually, we're talking about community-building in the schools, but that's in fact what we're doing in this group here. And yes, we've had some growing pains and struggles and things, but if we can't solve them in this group, how can we ever expect to solve them in the schools?"

Summary

My first research question explored the source of people's motivation to become involved in this type of work. I found that empathy based on personal experience led people to identify within themselves a common bond with refugee children and their families. I also found that shared values brought together and fuelled the passion of those involved. Principles rooted in these common values served from the beginning to keep people true to themselves and each other, and to guide the process. Looking back on our work, I realized that articulating values and principles was an uncommon but essential starting point, particularly when working for long term systemic change in a challenging environment.

Resources

In building school-based supports for refugee children, it is essential to know what

resources are necessary, which ones are already available within the setting, and which ones need to be obtained from elsewhere (Juras et al., 1997; Kloos et al., 1997; Trickett & Birman, 1989). Kloos et al.'s conceptual framework of viewing schools as open systems that are part of larger communities supported my findings related to human and other resources available to support school-based interventions for refugee children.

Human Resources

ESL teachers, supportive administrators, ESL parents and children, interpreters and translators, settlement workers, and professionals from community agencies all bring valuable resources to building supports for refugee children. First and foremost is the pivotal role played by ESL teachers: in building relationships with refugee children and their families; in helping to make links between ESL families, the school, and the community; in supporting refugee children through the difficult process of adapting to their new school and community; in educating the host school community about how to welcome and accommodate newcomer children and parents; and in advocating for the needs and rights of refugee families. This confirms Seskar-Hencic's (1996) finding about the importance of ESL teachers in the healing process of refugee children.

Supportive principals and administrators were identified by several different informants and in the research as the formal "gate keepers" to individual schools; they decide what activities may occur within the school and can facilitate or impede those activities (Johnson et al., 1997). They interpret policies and make decisions that affect how their staff can and cannot use their time. They also strongly influence the "tone" of a school, whether it is rigid or flexible in the interpretation of rules, whether it is

authoritarian or participatory (Coleman, 1982; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Ellis, 1988). As one administrator said, "it's essential, given the hierarchical nature of our schools, that there be people in charge who are really and truly sympathetic."

ESL parents and children, particularly those who are somewhat settled, can help bring the perspective of refugee families to teachers, administrators, School Councils, and other school community members. As one ESL parent explained:

> "I was trying to get the school staff and population to understand the culture and environment of the refugees. The other thing was to encourage the refugee parents to get involved in their children's education and their children's school...Unless we talk, we cannot understand."

My research revealed that refugee and immigrant parents and children have as much to teach as they have to learn. They play an important leadership role in cross-cultural bridging and communication. They often help with simple translations and interpretations that are not of a sensitive nature and don't require a trained interpreter. At Greenvale, newcomer students who have been in the school for a while are part of a buddy system to support the adaptation of newly arrived refugee and immigrant children.

Trained interpreters, translators and settlement workers are resources that occasionally need to be sought from outside the school. Several respondents mentioned that the lack of money to pay interpreters is impeding adequate communication between home and school.

> "There isn't anybody to translate the whole letter. All we had on the last one was, 'This is an important letter - have someone translate it for you...' I think we've got a lot going for us in the school but right now we can't go any further because of the lack of translators."

One informant spoke about how settlement workers can help not only with interpretation

but also with outreach and integrated family support.

> "They're really valuable, because not only do they speak the language, but they're cultural interpreters as well, and they may know this family as a whole [since they may have been the family's settlement worker when they first arrived in the community]. We try to treat the whole child, but in order to treat the whole child you have to deal with the family as whole, and the community in which that child is functioning."

Community agencies such as multicultural centres, global education centres, and counselling services were seen as providing important resources that schools do not have, including background information, cross-cultural education materials, and services such as counselling for refugees and newcomers.

Other Resources

The category of "other resources" included time, money, and information, with time frequently mentioned as the most valuable resource:

> "Time. Time for talking and building relationships, time for the kids to talk." (Researcher: "How do you see creating that time?") "It's probably the hardest resource to get in the school system because it's so valuable and it's so structured... if you're not standing in front of a class, teaching, you're seen as not doing your job."

Adequate time as a crucial resource for effective and successful school-based interventions is frequently mentioned in the literature (Cherniss, 1997; Peirson & Prilleltensky, 1994; Weinstein et al., 1991). However, in my research, while one teacher strongly agreed that time was the most important resource, she adamantly disagreed that there wasn't enough time to do this work. She asserted that if teachers take control of their time, think about it differently, use it differently, and challenge the limits of the system's "mind-set" about priorities and use of teachers' time , there is time to do this kind of work.

> "I am advocating taking time during the school day to deal with issues with kids and not pretend you're going to do reading all day and that that's the best way for these kids to learn 'cause it's not and we know that...It's not about money and it's not about time, it's about how we do our day-to-day work."

This comment strongly links the need for time to two other themes in the research: the need for teachers to become empowered to rethink and to change their own working conditions before they can change conditions for their students (Weinstein et al., 1991); and the need for structural changes in the system to create the conditions that will provide an equitable, safe, and supportive school environment for children (Cherniss, 1997).

Compared to human resources, participants didn't seem to feel that there was a great need for more money. Their main concern was that the current funding not be cut back, particularly funding of ESL programs and teachers. When money was mentioned as a resource, it was mainly linked to paying for interpreters and small program costs for things not covered by school budgets.

> "I don't think money is a very large resource...Well, a little bit of money...If we're going to ask people to bring things [refreshments] to these meetings, especially if they're on welfare or government assistance, we need to be able to reimburse people for those things. Sometimes there's printing costs, we may need to pay translators...so there does need to be some money there to have that flexibility."

Several participants alluded to the risk of money dictating what you do rather than being a resource that enables you to do what you want. This can happen when people tailor their work to fit the funding available, or when they believe they are powerless to do anything without money. In fact, the STTWG has always operated on the premise that, by pooling available resources and people in this community, the capacity exists to do this

kind of work.

Information that was mentioned as being useful included: current local trends in refugee settlement; emerging refugee needs and issues; background information on refugee-producing regions of the world, information about local groups and services for refugees; and more knowledge and understanding about how to support refugee children and their families.

Summary

My second research question dealt with resources and generated information about who should be involved and what is needed. I found that human resources, particularly caring and dedicated ESL teachers, are most important in building supports for refugee children. However, it was also apparent that ESL teachers cannot do this job alone and that people from different levels within the school and the community are needed and available. Involving people from different levels is crucial for at least two reasons: 1) each one can access different and often complimentary resources, such as language, cultural understanding, power, and in-kind services; and 2) all are educated through the process of involvement and can work for change in their own community and at their own different level. None of the resources actually require a lot of new funding; it is more a question of knowing where to look and how to access them. Nevertheless, it is important to note that, at the time of concluding this thesis (Spring, 1999) some of these resources, particularly ESL programs and teachers, are facing serious funding cuts, which will jeopardize the progress made in building supportive school communities for refugee children.

Interdependence: Processes and Actions, Partnerships, and Dynamics

Under the heading of "interdependence", I considered a number of important questions about building school-based community supports for refugee children. I particularly wanted to know what processes, actions, partnerships, and dynamics were involved. Some of the things I learned were linked to my findings about underlying principles. For example, given that using a community development approach was identified as a key principle, it wasn't surprising to find that one of the main processes that respondents named and talked about was the process of community building.

Processes and Actions

Participants referred to many processes and actions that need to take place in order to build supports for refugee children. These seemed to naturally belong to either one of two main streams: processes related to community building, and actions related to making change. However, the way in which participants discussed them indicated that they were interdependent and that none could happen without the others.

Community building. Clearly, building community was considered to be essential in the eyes of all participants. As many researchers of refugee issues have pointed out (Ahearn & Athey, 1991; Beiser et al., 1995; Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994; Seskar-Hencic, 1996; Silka & Tip, 1994), rebuilding a sense of community is particularly important for refugees who have been abruptly and often brutally cut off from the communities of which they were a part. Silka and Tip (1994) promote community and capacity-building as being more empowering and culturally appropriate than some traditional western approaches that target individuals for treatment.

Almost everyone in the study referred to the importance of building values-based relationships between individuals and groups at all levels. These relationships were seen as the building blocks for people feeling a sense of belonging and a capacity to effect change (MacGillivary et al., 1998). A number of other processes linked to community building included community outreach, two-way communication, harmonization, and working for inclusion. Since these have been extensively reported on and discussed earlier in the thesis, I will limit comments in this section to new information.

Community outreach. Although I found little in the literature that specifically describes community outreach, what I did find referred to the importance of using different and often more informal and personal approaches than schools typically use to reach mainstream families (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). One key informant described an outreach initiative he had taken with children in the community surrounding his school:

> "Well, in the spring, I rounded up bicycles for kids, and these kids were complaining that their bikes were broken, would I come and fix them. So as soon as I had time, I loaded all my bike parts in my van and went down, it was a Saturday. I was down in the mall. They came out to help me fix the bikes, then all these other kids came out. One of the mums sent out popsicles for all the kids. It was a great community time."

Two-way communication. Participants made many references to the need to improve the process of two-way communication between refugee families and the school, emphasizing the listening, rather than the telling, side of the communication equation. Several research participants also emphasized the importance of learning to listen without making judgements or assumptions. One respondent said,

> "I found that one of the big things is that we're just not listening to kids and their families. We're going ahead and just doing things the way we

would do things with anyone, and we have to take a look at the needs of our folks so that they feel good about what they're doing, they feel part of what they're doing."

A second participant elaborated eloquently on this point, saying,

> "When we listen to people's stories, we need to pay attention to the systemic aspects and change what it is about the way we do things here. I think the system is also us and how we are present in it...and I think there is some risk in that for us...Perhaps the greater risk is the risk of being transformed, of being changed as a person and as a system. I think it's a risk worth taking."

ESL parent nights and community gatherings like the Somali Tea Party described in the Greenvale Case study are effective ways of creating rich opportunities for two-way communication between the school community and refugee communities.

> "I'll never forget what that speaker said at the Greenvale ESL parents' night. It was, 'If you ask us to come to a meeting and we have to go to work that night, we feel again, 'I can't support my kids at school because I have to work. And so I'm carrying this guilt around.' It's just so important to provide opportunities for parents to let us know what they need, and then we can try to find ways of meeting some of those needs."

While overcoming the language barrier is an important consideration in two-way communication with refugee families, perhaps even more important is changing attitudes that make language differences more of a barrier than necessary. This was a point that I did not find mentioned in the literature that I reviewed, but that emerged strongly from my research:

> "People come to me all the time, I get called out of my classroom to go down and help out a non-English speaking family register...I don't speak that language! But I've had experience, I can be animated, I can draw pictures, and I'm less inhibited."

Harmonization. Harmonization is a term I coined to mean the role school

communities need to play in order to achieve a balance in respectfully celebrating both the differences and the commonalities that exist in newcomer students. Harmonization can facilitate the process of integration. The school's job is harmonization; the newcomer child's job is integration. As one respondent explained:

> "Because each one of us has ESL children in our classroom, first of all we have to recognize and accept their differences in language and culture. You encourage them to respect their first language and their culture, but help them as best you can to fit in."

Another respondent, who had previously spoken about valuing diversity in her students, went on to talk about not singling out ESL children and highlighting their differences.

> "In our school, we don't centre them out, I mean we don't have an ESL club, an ESL choir. I encourage students to become involved in the choir, and the sports groups, and the clubs. It helps them with their identity. They are not just an ESL student in that school, they are an integral part of that school...and they're valued for whatever they can contribute."

Kaprielian-Churchill and Churchill (1994) highlight an often overlooked but key dimension of the process of harmonization. While we assume that harmonization is needed between the mainstream and the immigrant cultures, we often forget that this same process may need to be supported between opposing factions of people who, to others, appear to come from the same origins.

Working for inclusion. Ways of working for inclusion range from some of the obvious and simple activities that have already been mentioned - such as having welcoming signs in different languages in the hall - to much more fundamental changes, such as adapting the educational programs and systems to meet their needs. The comments of one classroom teacher who had had ESL children as part of her classes for

many years reflected the far end of this spectrum:

> "Probably for most of us here, we've had ESL students here for so long, we just accept them as a segment of our class population and that's the way it is...it never enters my mind to think, 'Oh boy, I'm going to have to do this for the ESL kids.' Because you just do it, you don't think about it any more."

Beyond accepting ESL children as a normal part of a school's population, one ESL teacher believed that adapting curriculum means changing what is taught and the strategies for teaching it so it is meaningful and understandable to all children in the class. She asserted that the definition of "mainstream" needs to change as the population of the schools change:

> "The mainstream is what kids are writing about, what they are reading about, and what they are doing their math about....Why not, when you're reading a novel, choose a book that relates to these kids' life experience, so they can talk about what's happening, if they choose to?...If what people are telling me is true, over 50 per cent of children in some schools are ESL [or have been in ESL] and so the mainstream should be ESL! It just gets me so angry, because it's so racist! We should be making the curriculum relevant and accessible to all kids."

Mukherjee (1992) echoes this assertion that racism cannot be dealt with by the addition of a "positive curriculum" alone, and that changes in currently accepted policies, practices, and procedures are required.

Perhaps at the farthest end of the spectrum is recognizing that refugee children are not the only ones who struggle with the issue of belonging, and that working for inclusion is something that needs to be done with every group that feels marginalized:

> "Kids here don't belong for those very same reasons...The native student that I worked with who has so many siblings who are suicidal or who have killed themselves, doesn't belong here for those very reasons...There are many reasons why children do not have that most basic sense of belonging

that have to do with race and class and gender."

This insight is reflected in the growing body of anti-oppression literature, which goes beyond oppression based on racism to include oppression by a dominant group against any group that is "different" (Garcia & Van Soest, 1997; Latting, 1990). An anti-oppression approach seeks to eliminate inequities based on differences such as race, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, age, class, economic status (Latting, 1990).

Making change. When speaking about making change, participants emphasized the need to work at the level of systemic change. One participant expressed her concern that usually the focus is on making refugee children fit the system rather than changing the system to meet the needs of the child.

> "You have to very careful not to just reward those students who are quiet and fit very nicely into the little system that's already there. And that's very easy to do, we reward that behaviour, and see other behaviours as being difficult, as opposed to being different...These kids who aren't angry but they're always more active, louder, more gregarious, are seen as disruptive students, as opposed to active and gregarious students. Rather than looking at the system, we think about that little hole that we're trying to shove them into."

Another participant, in talking about the isolation that disempowers ESL teachers, asserted that the question to ask is, "What's causing the isolation?" She believed that "at the root of the isolation is a system that's making and forcing us to do things that are ridiculous and not about learning." She suggested approaches to changing the system to facilitate building supports for refugee children, including bringing people together to share their analysis and resources, and encouraging them to challenge assumptions:

> "Part of my political analysis is that we are all working in isolation and we're all recognizing that basic human needs are not being met in the system...As long as we keep working in these pockets of isolated, labelled kids, we're not going to move towards changing the system."

The need to intervene and seek support at multiple levels was reflected in both the research and in all aspects of the literature review, particularly those which addressed school-based prevention programs (Cherniss, 1997; Johnson et al., 1997; Peirson & Prilleltensky, 1994; Trickett & Birman, 1989; Weinstein et al., 1991). What is required is: political support from school authorities at different levels; the "blessing" and recognition of different constituencies, such as teachers' colleagues; and access to resources, including time out of the classroom and even out of the school, to meet with others, develop ideas, and implement programs.

The two main strategies for making change that emerged from the research were education and advocacy.

Education. Research participants universally referred to on-going education at all levels as a key strategy for creating the safe, inclusive environments needed by refugee children. As previously mentioned, racism at all levels of the school system was continually raised during discussions about safety and belonging; therefore, the links between anti-racist education and creating a safe environment became obvious.

Participants in one focus group spent a lot of time discussing these links. One described cross-cultural education without anti-racist education as "cut-and-paste multiculturalism." Another compared it to addressing issues of violence against women and children without talking about oppression. A third expressed frustration at being

silenced in regards to raising the issue of racism in the school system. The researcher expressed her amazement at finding how frequently and strongly the issue of racism was mentioned throughout the research. The discussion concluded with someone suggesting that anti-racism be articulated as one of our values.

Advocacy. Advocating for the needs of refugee children and families within the school community and at a broader community level emerged as an essential strategy. Research participants spoke about advocacy in terms of promoting the needs of refugee children, supporting the role of ESL teachers in responding to these needs, and pressuring for changes at systemic levels in order to recognize, value, and fund this work.

> "I would say that the system will become more rigid in the next years and it has to do with all the new policies. The boards are going to have less control on schools and budgets. I wonder if we should consider doing advocacy, and not going any more to principals, but going to the board of education and coming with very strong arguments and facts for them about the necessity of teachers getting involved in this area."

> "From working in the board and from seeing things happen, I think that's a really smart move, validating teachers and really supporting teachers doing things, and parents, and communities. Even enlightened people who I work with tell me that anti-racism stuff is extra. It's not extra, it's central to that very basic question [of safety and belonging]."

During the course of this research, the CSG became involved in an advocacy action protesting possible cuts to ESL funding by the WRDSB. From comments made after a series of presentations to trustees of the WRDSB in 1998, we learned that the impact of this series of presentations had been felt at several levels: by Board members, who were educated; by presenters, who felt empowered; and by ESL teachers, refugee parents, and refugee children, who felt supported. We also learned that, strategically,

refugee parents and community members had more credibility in advocacy at this level; presentations by ESL staff would have been perceived as an effort to protect their jobs, rather than the interests of their students. The outcome of the hearings was that ESL funding for 1998/99 was not cut at all at the elementary level and was reduced by 20% at the high school level. The CSG is continuing to lobby to protect ESL funding at the local board level. It has also been taking its concerns to the ministry level, from which cuts to education funding have originated, and plans to raise this issue in the next provincial election.

School-based Partnerships

In previous sections I have discussed various aspects of partnership. Under the heading Values and Principles, I included my findings about why individuals and groups choose to work together. The section entitled Resources primarily identified who the partners should be and what resources they could bring. Here, I present my findings on why schools are seen to be pivotal partners in building supports for refugee children.

As well as being the main point of contact between refugee children and the host community, schools are, along with other societal institutions such as families, churches, and neighbourhoods, settings within which to promote competence, foster respect for diversity, and buffer children from negative consequences of difficult experience (Juras et al., 1997). When viewed as part of an open system in a neighbourhood context, schools can also be an important location for bridging gaps with isolated children and families, pooling resources, and engaging in collective action (Kloos et al., 1997). Given the protective and compensatory nature of close personal relationships in fostering resilience

in children (Johnson, 1997), schools are usually the first and most important setting beyond the family in which refugee children have contact with caring and supportive adults (Seskar-Hencic, 1996). Many children can be reached at the same time; all can be included; and no one feels left out (Johnson et al., 1997). When an ecological approach is used, interventions bring together significant adults to promote adaptive outcomes, reduce sources of stress, enhance life opportunities, prevent problems, and promote health (Johnson et al., 1997). In this sense, the emphasis is on building a supportive environment which ultimately benefits all children and adults in the school and classroom setting.

This does not mean that schools are always the easiest partners with which to work:

> "Schools, for me, are the ideal setting to work with children and they have immense potential. But sometimes I've felt that potential was wasted, for many different reasons. Sometimes it has to do with the lack of interest, sometimes teachers or counsellors are tired, sometimes they don't want to complicate their lives, sometimes they're just giving up. Sometimes teachers want to do things, but the system doesn't allow them to do so, so it's a little frustrating; you see all this system and there are so many possibilities and we're exploiting so few."

Greenvale's relationship with the EASC was mentioned by one participant as a successful example of a school-based partnership relationship. This participant believed that school systems tend to compartmentalize, with the ESL department in one corner, the special education department in another corner, the classroom teachers in another, and ESL students sometimes isolated on their own. He indicated that the partnership between the school and the EASC helped to bring these different groups together to reach out to ESL families and children. The participation of community groups such as a settlement

agency and the Community Health Department helped break down the barrier that often exists between the school and the larger community, and provided valuable in-kind services and resources. Among agency partners, none tried to claim credit for the success of the Greenvale initiative; they were happy for the school community to "own" the credit:

> "That's the neat thing about Greenvale...it's always been a group collective sort of thing which certainly had great support from ISAP, but ISAP's not taking responsibility for it, and Equity Action, well, that's everybody."

Power was an aspect of partnerships that was little mentioned in the research; however, one comment seemed significant to the theme of partnership. A participant stated that large organizations often want to play a coordinating role in partnership processes. From her point of view, coordination was synonymous with control. She argued that when a large organization loses control, it loses interest in the process. In a similar way, when a large organization controls a grassroots initiative, community identification with and a sense of ownership of the initiative are lost and the grassroots nature of the project is destroyed. It is important to be aware of these kinds of dynamics in partnership relationships. If they can be named, it is possible for partners with a shared commitment to discuss and resolve them.

Dynamics

Any initiative takes place in a complex system in which there are various dynamics that will effect it. In order to maximize positive forces, avoid or minimize negative forces, and be in harmony with others, it is important to know what these forces are. I classified

the dynamics that I learned about in the research as positive forces, negative forces, timing, benefits, and risks.

Positive forces. The forces that were identified as working in favour of building school-based community supports were: the existence of the ESL program and committed ESL teachers; a growing number of principals who are concerned about and willing to respond to the needs of ESL students in their schools; the increasing role of School Councils; and the grass-roots nature of the work. Since the positive roles of ESL teachers and school principals have already been covered in the human resources section, these will not be repeated.

School Councils were mentioned several times as being a positive force since they can provide a setting in which mainstream parents and refugee parents can work and learn together. Mainstream parents can share their knowledge of Canadian society and the school system and how it works. Refugee parents can share their knowledge of the refugee experience and of their culture. Together they can identify and work on ways of making their school and the system a place in which all children feel safe and belong. This potential was recently illustrated by a joint presentation by a new Canadian mother and a Canadian-born mother, made on behalf of their School Council in support of ESL funding.

The grass-roots nature of this approach was also seen as a strength. Research participants mentioned that direct contact with community members helped keep them grounded in and focussed on work that was useful, rather than getting lost in work that could become irrelevant, theoretical, or bureaucratic. One focus group participant who originally came to Canada as a refugee expressed it this way and sounded a chord for

other group members:

> "I started having this weird feeling that to work with survivors can become a science, like a new field of study, and I really hate that approach and mainly in this society, that everything becomes a science and then you start writing books and journal articles...So I was really afraid, 'Are we going to take that direction?' But no one here is an expert in this area, we have people with personal experience, but it's still like a grass-roots group, even though we [some of us] are coming from agencies."

There was a strong feeling among CSG members that, not only do we need to keep refugee children and parents at the heart of our work, we need to work harder to find ways of working with them. Most participants commented that, while the CSG values inclusiveness and has tried to reflect that in its membership and its work, there is still a lot to be done to reach out to refugee communities. As one participant said:

> "We should move to the heart of *their* work. Not just say, 'You're welcome to join us,' but rather, 'We're going to change so we can work together."

Negative forces. Many negative forces were identified that participants felt worked against their efforts to build supports for refugee children. The major ones were the nature of the school system itself, the impact of the larger current political and economic climate, systemic racism, and a sense of powerlessness.

Participants referred frequently to the current system as bureaucratic, hierarchical, and rigid. A number of people indicated that when teachers try to develop supports for refugee children, they run up against barriers in the system: it isn't in their job description; their supervisor doesn't think it's important; there isn't time; there is no money. Several people commented on the isolation and "compartmentalization" of work within the schools. There seems to be little opportunity for teachers to share ideas between schools,

within the ESL department, or even within the same school. This means that good ideas don't get passed on and good initiatives often die because of lack of encouragement and support. These same frustrations about the bureaucratic nature of schools and school systems were mentioned in a number of places in the literature on school-based interventions (Cherniss, 1991; Juras et al., 1997; Weinstein et al., 1991).

One person spoke about barriers that exist when the school doesn't see itself as part of the larger community and people in the neighbourhood don't feel a sense of ownership for the school. As a result, issues that cross school/community boundaries, such as recreation, safety, and racism, cannot be dealt with effectively. The following quote reflects many of the comments made about the impact of negative forces within the school system and the barriers they create.

> "I remember one of the Greenvale meetings. An issue that was generated by newcomer parents was the safety of kids going to and from school. It's quite a busy street, there was some bullying going on, a lot of parents were quite concerned about it. Well, at that time, the principal didn't want to touch that with a ten foot pole, like, 'It's not a school issue, so we're not going to talk about it in our school meeting.'...And I think it's important to make our systems flex a little bit...I remember this one man saying that in his country, the community owns its school. He was just expressing a whole lot of disbelief when they would say that other people own our schools, and that the community doesn't take ownership of the school and the life that goes on within."

This comment highlights the point made by Kloos et al. (1997) when they argue for bridging the gap between schools and their surrounding neighbourhoods.

Many comments reported in other sections of this thesis also illustrated participants' concerns about the massive and pervasive impact of the current social context within which schools are operating. In summary, these concerns included: the

increasing rigidity of the system; the loss of school boards' power and decision-making to the provincial Ministry of Education; the devaluing of teachers' role in providing social supports; and the decrease of morale and increase of burn-out among teachers. As one teacher said, "if you ask any teacher to take on one more thing right now, it could be digging for treasure, and you're not going to get anybody, you know?"

Several specific comments about the global impact of potential cuts to ESL funding were summed up by one classroom teacher:

> "If ESL teachers are taken away [because of government cuts to funding], we'll have a real difficult time...It will affect the whole classroom, it will affect the whole atmosphere of a whole school, it will be very difficult."

Given the findings of this research project and others - that ESL teachers are pivotal in building supports for refugee children - such cuts would have a huge impact on all children's well-being, both academically and socially.

Throughout the research and among all participants, one of the most commonly and clearly identified barriers to building supports for refugee children was systemic racism, not just in schools but in the larger society. Although racism has been mentioned several times in other parts of this thesis, I believe it is an important factor and warrants a summary of the key findings.

A very significant and important distinction was made by participants between racist incidents and systemic racism. People felt that racist incidents in some schools, such as Greenvale, were much more effectively and appropriately handled than in the past, partly because of anti-racism education but also because of the strong influence and modelling of certain individuals. However, concern was expressed that, if those strong

and racially aware individuals were not replaced by like-minded people, the ground that had been gained in some schools could easily be lost. They also believed that the entrenched practices and attitudes of the larger system, such as the lack of racial diversity among school staff or rewarding and sanctioning certain behaviours, had not really changed. Participants noted that racist attitudes exist even among people who were trying to be more ethnoculturally sensitive, and stressed how important it is to be vigilant about our own attitudes. One participant discussed her involvement in a school behaviour committee to illustrate how our collective valuing of one behaviour over another can be culturally determined and result in systematic discrimination against those who are different.

In speaking about the impact of racism in the community on children and families in the schools, one respondent recalled the situation that had led her to join the CSG:

> "I had a child who mystified me: quiet, sweet, docile, attentive, but she had huge gaps in her learning, and I mean bigger gaps than what you would expect considering the mount of time her education had been interrupted. So in talking to the father...I said, quite innocently, 'Does she feel safe here?' And his eyes got wide and he said, 'Oh! Funny you should ask that. We've been terrorized by a gang of teen-age kids. We've had to call the police on three different occasions. [And they don't always come.] They surround the house and scream and throw things at the house.' So here was a child who was not feeling safe in her environment here. That trauma she had experienced back home carried over here. And she wasn't learning.."

Not surprisingly, comments that reflected a sense of powerlessness often emerged at the same time as those about cut-backs, time pressures, and racism. This in itself became a negative force, since many people, especially teachers felt overwhelmed and couldn't see their power to change the system. One participant who commented

frequently on the degree of powerlessness she observed in her colleagues referred to it as "mental slavery" and asserted that nothing would ever change as long as people were mired in an attitude of hopelessness. In spite of her determination to work with others to change the system, she expressed her own fears about becoming disempowered when she said, "Maybe the desperation in my voice is that I fear I will get stuck in that same mentality, because I see it so pervasively around me."

Timing. My own journal reflections, participants' comments, and the literature (Peirson & Prilleltensky, 1994) documented the importance of timing when planning and implementing any new initiatives. For example, in terms of schools, as well as many community organizations, September is a key start-up time. New initiatives need to have been discussed and planned well in advance if they are to start then. The year in which the research was carried out (1997-98) was a particularly challenging one in which to find an appropriate time to approach schools with new ideas and requests for involvement because of the province-wide teachers' protest in the fall of 1997 and the imposition of many cutbacks and changes throughout the education system. Participants also mentioned that timing is an important consideration in terms of the decision-making process of large institutions like schools. They pointed out that one needs to know when key meetings are scheduled and how much in advance participants need to receive written documentation for consideration.

Positive outcomes. Most of the positive outcomes of building school-based community supports for refugee children that were identified from the research were what I expected: improving refugee children's capacity to succeed academically as well as

socially; increased understanding and harmony between newcomers and mainstream children, families, and staff; and an opportunity for those involved to break down their isolation, share resources, and learn from and support each other. Participants' comments in other parts of this thesis support these findings and won't be repeated here.

One unanticipated outcome that was strongly and explicitly mentioned several times by different participants was the extent to which this work on behalf of refugee students could benefit other groups of students struggling with the same issues of safety and belonging. This was a finding that I did not encounter in my reading of relevant literature. One teacher expressed it this way:

> "I think generally, if a child is not feeling safe, they're going to be preoccupied with, like how they're going to safely get home for lunch. They're not going to care about their math class so much. So I think this is absolutely essential. But having said that, you have to have a safe environment for all kids, whether they're ESL or not."

From the people I interviewed and from the presentations in support of ESL funding, I learned that refugee children benefit academically and socially when support is provided for them to cope with past hurts and adapt to new challenges. This finding is supported by other studies reported on by Johnson et al. (1997) which demonstrate that, in the general student population, competence, mental health, and academic achievement are inseparable. As in the case of the nine-year old refugee child whose story was related earlier, once the teacher had an understanding about her student's past traumatic experiences and the threatening incidents she was facing in her new neighbourhood, she was able to work with the child's father and link him with another parent who had struggled with a similar incident.

Another positive outcome of this work was the increased understanding between children of different backgrounds who find themselves in the same classroom. As one non-ESL teacher explained:

> "This is a real eye-opener for these kids, a real learning experience. One of the children in the classroom didn't realize that another child had to leave their country literally 'on the run', and couldn't understand why this kid was behaving in this really 'strange' way. And once she learned that and understood, then she understood the behaviour and was more accepting."

Negative outcomes. Research participants cautioned against a number of different negative outcomes that they saw identified with this work, particularly to refugee children and to ESL teachers. The central concern was marginalization. Research participants expressed the fear that developing programs specifically to respond to these children's needs could lead to them being further segregated from the mainstream, since according to those interviewed, refugee children and ESL teachers already felt victimized and marginalized. As one focus group participant said:

> "My fear would be that, without all of us and the teachers and everybody really understanding the issues and being able to accept the diverse strategies, people would get more victimized."

Marginalization was a threat to ESL teachers who feared being seen as a "special-interest group" within the school because their work was specialized and they were the main ones to bring attention to the issues of refugee children. One teacher recognized this when she said:

> "I get lumped in with 'all those ESL kids', you know? 'Oh, that's just the ESL program' or 'That's just for the kids who are new.' There is that risk of being marginalized...Are there risks to me being visible? Sure! I often tell people things they don't want to hear or I make suggestions."

This is consistent with Weinstein et al.'s (1991) finding that remedial teachers are labelled along with their students.

Another aspect of marginalization was the compartmentalization that ESL teachers identified in responding to refugee families within the school. Other staff assumed that they did not have the capacity to communicate with newcomer families and automatically called the ESL teacher, as the following exchange illustrated:

> "People come to me all the time, I get called out of my classroom to go down and help out a Vietnamese family register! (Researcher, jokingly: How did you learn Vietnamese?) I don't speak Vietnamese! But I've had experience, I can be animated, I can draw pictures, and I'm less inhibited [about trying these different forms of communication]."

In this way, the barriers of communication between refugee families and other staff in the school remained up and the message was effectively reinforced that only the ESL teacher could communicate with them.

Concern about marginalization gathered strength throughout the research process and was linked to another potential negative outcome, the risk of not being able to sustain this work. Participants feared that if the needs of refugee children are seen as separate from and marginal to those of the "mainstream," then the resources needed will not be available and initiatives to build supports for refugee children will not be sustainable.

Participants identified raising people's hopes and not being able to follow through as another potential negative outcome. One person from a refugee background explained that there is a cost to survivors when they tell their stories; it is often very hard on them emotionally to revisit traumatic experiences. But they do it, thinking that the impact of their personal testimony will make a difference in the way things are done here, that

perhaps it will result in increased sensitivity, understanding, and support. He said that they are then disappointed and angry to find there is no immediate and widespread result, since this kind of change takes place slowly in Canada.

The final potentially negative outcome named by participants was exploiting refugee parents as volunteers, particularly as volunteer translators and interpreters. As one participant pointed out:

> "There is a fine line between asking a parent to be involved in the school, and asking a parent to volunteer their time away from looking for work or going to school, because they have a skill that we need but we're not willing or we're not able to pay for it."

Summary

My third research question explored the nature and impact of processes, partnerships, and dynamics in planning and developing school-based community supports for refugee children. I found that the many processes mentioned belonged to one of two main streams: processes related to community building, and actions related to making change. Community building included outreach to refugee families and communities, two-way communication with refugee parents, cross-cultural harmonization, and working for inclusion of children from diverse backgrounds. Establishing a sense of community and belonging was found to be particularly important for refugee families and children because of the loss of community and safety they experienced in fleeing their countries of origin. Education and advocacy emerged as the essential actions for change. Anti-racist education and advocating for the needs of refugee children within the school and the community were key change strategies. Since ESL teachers were found to be pivotal

supports for refugee children and schools with large ESL populations, advocacy efforts in the Kitchener-Waterloo community focused on protecting funding for ESL programs.

School-based partnerships were found to be very desirable. School settings can promote competence, foster respect for diversity, and buffer children from the negative consequences of difficult experiences, such as war and refugeeism. They offer a possible location from which to bridge gaps between refugee families and the larger community, to pool resources in support of refugee children, and to engage in collective action. Barriers to building such partnerships include the bureaucratic and hierarchical nature of most school systems, the marginalization of diverse populations, and the stressful and negative atmosphere created in many Ontario schools at the time of this research, due to political and economic changes at the provincial level.

Sustainability

In any intervention, before time, energy and resources have been invested to develop a program or to bring about change, the big question is: How will we continue to build on and sustain this work so that it has a lasting impact (Trickett & Birman, 1989)? The key components of sustainability that emerged from the data were: working for fundamental changes in the system; thinking creatively; fostering grass-roots participation and empowerment; identifying allies and activists within the system; working in flexible partnerships at multiple levels; and documenting the work. These findings are again linked to previously reported material, so only new information will be presented here.

Changing the System

The most frequently mentioned key to sustaining this work is the need to go

beyond single projects in isolated schools. This finding, that sustainability of individual interventions is linked to larger systemic changes, is strongly supported in the literature on school-based and other preventive interventions for children (Cherniss, 1991; Cherniss, 1997; Gager & Elias, 1997; Juras et al., 1997; Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill, 1994; Trickett, 1997; Weinstein, et al., 1991; Weissberg & Bell, 1997). In spite of increasing numbers and their relative impact on classrooms and schools, participants asserted that immigrant and refugee children are largely seen and treated as marginal to the mainstream population. While Greenvale was seen as having achieved significant progress as an individual school, even its gains were considered vulnerable to changes in individual staff, parents, and of course the system as a whole.

Thinking Creatively and Overturning Accepted Paradigms of Learning

Research participants frequently spoke about the need to challenge assumptions in order to achieve sustainable changes. One member of the CSG in particular continually challenged the group to think creatively. She referred to what she called "mental slavery": accepting the limits of the system as an immutable "given" rather than trying to see how things can be done completely differently. Her fear was that, as long as teachers and others believe the status quo is fixed, they will continue to believe they don't have the time, the money, or the power to do the things they believe are important for children, and nothing will change. As an example, she challenged the notion that adequate reading instruction is the only factor in a child learning to read. Both the literature on refugee children and the findings of this thesis support this challenge. However, as long as teachers accept the traditional notion of learning, they will always be obliged to provide

additional supports and alternative approaches on their own personal time. These "add-ons" will be among the first things to be dropped when funding is cut or individual teachers are too stressed.

Fostering Grassroots Participation and Empowerment

In the same way that grassroots participation is a positive force in this type of work, it was also identified as being essential to the long-term sustainability of building supports for refugee children. Keeping members of refugee communities at the heart of this work ensures that it is powered and directed by those who have the most to gain or lose from its success. As one school staff participant pointed out about his experience at Greenvale,

> "We learned very quickly that, if it's our agenda, we're not going to get a lot of community support. If it's their agenda, there'll be more support."

Refugees' personal stories, when they share them, are often a source of inspiration for others with whom they work. By being full participants, they also gain a sense of empowerment (Cherniss, 1997; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Juras et al., 1997; Lord & Hutchison, 1993; Pilisuk et al., 1996). In talking about her support work with groups of refugee and immigrant children, one participant described this process of empowerment and its impact on children.

> "It's basically a way for them to have time to look at who they are, to see their strengths. And to feel empowered...There was this group of kids that had witnessed a lot of violence, and had a lot of guilt about leaving...They organized a food and toy drive for [names country] and they had this huge dance for the whole school, and this was a tough senior school, and they did it all. At the end of the dance, we said, 'Would the girls who organized this please stand up?' And the girls stood up, people were just looking at them, like, 'These kids did *this*?!' And we just applauded!"

Perhaps most importantly, the value of ensuring grassroots participation in this work is that it means that there is broad-based support to carry it on. The long term vulnerability of much prevention work is highlighted by the meta-analysis done by Durlak and Wells (1997) in which they found that over half the preventive interventions they reviewed were delivered by people from outside the settings in which they were implemented (Trickett, 1997).

Identifying Allies and Working in Partnership

Participants spoke about the need for identifying allies and working in flexible, multi-level partnerships, two previously-reported themes, as also being important in sustaining school-based community supports. Allies in key positions, such as principals, sympathetic mainstream parents, trusted community leaders, and others, can use their position, credibility and voice to facilitate access to moral support or resources from groups with which they work. Building partnerships with at least one or two larger stable groups provides access to on-going resources and ensures that if one group disappears or has to withdraw, the work is still able to continue (Juras et al., 1997). As an example, one participant talked about the value of linking community groups, government funders, and schools:

> "If programs like this one [being developed by the CSG] are successful, maybe there is potential for program restructuring that allows for better utilization of resources from community supports or community groups, also linking them to institutions such as schools and then building partnerships even among funders, and maybe allowing room for new ideas."

One person explicitly connected sustainability with flexibility in partnerships.

Given the variety of pressures, particularly on the school systems right now, if partnerships are not flexible, then they become another demand rather than a support for stressed out teachers, administrators, and families. Another participant mentioned the importance of simultaneously using several approaches to bring about change:

> "Be careful not to get involved with only one thing. Talking about advocacy, I believe in advocacy and the need to work on that, but at the same time, don't let us be one hundred percent involved in advocacy because the advocacy can be very frustrating too."

Documenting The Work

It was evident from the research that documentation was an important tool for: sharing ideas, approaches, and resources with others; generating a sense of accomplishment; and demonstrating to others the impact and value of this work in order to obtain future resources. As participants from Greenvale and elsewhere told me of their achievements in developing supports for refugee children, I could see their dawning realization and pride. One person mentioned that she had been criticized in a recent evaluation for not documenting her group work with ESL children, and yet she had done a lot of creative and innovative programming with refugee children that would have been of great interest to others if only they had known about it. In fact, she mentioned that, by chance, a television station had learned about one of the groups she had done in response to bullying that had racial overtones, and had come to film it. As this community becomes more diverse, it is even more important to document and share some of this pioneering work with others.

The need for documentation is articulated in the literature by Johnson et al. (1997).

They assert that a major barrier to the implementation of primary prevention programs in schools is the failure of researchers and practitioners to clearly articulate and communicate the benefits. Teachers, administrators, parents, school-board members, and government funders must have an understanding of the relationship between mental health, school adjustment, and school success so that adequate resources are made available. A respondent also commented on the trend towards measurable outcomes, particularly in the school system, and the increasing pressure to use evaluation and documentation to justify "every penny spent." In order to sustain and extend the work of building supports for refugee children, documented evidence of its value is necessary.

Some people believed that it would be difficult to measure the impact of this work, especially given that it is the kind of work in which it is hard to pin-point cause-and-effect. As well, the results are sometimes seen only over a long time period. Others thought that there were some very clear indicators of success, such as: a smaller number of racially-linked incidents needing to be dealt with by teachers and administrator; the diminishing seriousness of these incidents; the degree of satisfaction on the part of children and parents as to how they were handled; the sense of belonging felt by refugee children and their parents within the school; the degree of involvement of refugee parents within the school; and the extent to which refugee parents felt comfortable in expressing their concerns to school staff. A number of previously-cited anecdotes were shared throughout the research in response to questions about how to document the impact of this work. Readers may recall one anecdote about a family that had moved away from Greenvale, encountered

racism in their new school, and returned to the Greenvale neighbourhood so that their children could again feel safe and comfortable in that school's welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. Another story was about a refugee child from another province who came to school on the first day without her traditional head covering and who came the second day wearing it with a big smile on her face. The impact of these stories on me and on others who heard them indicated to me the importance of recording them and including them as a way of measuring the outcomes of this work.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In spite of the growing numbers of refugee families seeking to start a new life in Canada, there is little or no documentation of how to support this process, particularly for children (Seskar-Hencic, 1996). By focussing on local work being done, first by the EASC and then by the CSG, I learned a great deal about planning and developing school-based community supports for refugee children. In order to capture and present the key findings in a more usable way, I summarized them in Table 2. I linked the values to what I saw as the four key components of the work. To illustrate how these components were translated into action, I listed some of the many creative initiatives described by my research participants. Finally, I identified some of the associated outcomes named in the literature and in my research.

Table 2

Main Components	**Support** for refugee children	**Outreach and Community Building** with refugee families	**Education** for school and larger community	**Advocacy** to change the system
Values	caring & compassion	self-determination & participation	health & diversity	distributive justice
Objectives	-to minimize risk factors in refugee children's new environment -to maximize protective factors in their new environment -to support and build on their natural resilience -to enhance or introduce new coping skills	-to improve communication between school and refugee families -to increase refugee parents' involvement in children's school life for the overall well-being of children -to increase refugee parents' awareness and understanding of how the school system works and how to make it work for them	-to increase awareness and ability/willingness to respond appropriately to all individual and systemic forms of racism within school, school system, and community at large -to increase appreciation and acceptance of diversity among students, teachers, parents, and school community as a whole	-to gain access to resources needed to achieve other objectives -to address larger social change issues (eg. racism in school system and community; cuts to education and social programs that affect refugee children and families)
Creative Initiatives	-minimize risk of revictimizing refugee children by working to eliminate racist incidents, and racism within school community (see "education") -minimize risk of stigmatizing refugee children by using universal strategy of valuing all forms of diversity -maintain adequate level of ESL programming, since ESL teachers are pivotal in providing support to refugee children and linking with families and community -support opportunities for refugee children to maintain cultural identity by actively accommodating diversity (eg. provide alternative room at lunch time for those who are fasting) -develop in-school supports for new refugee children (eg. "first language buddies") -provide supportive settings in which children know they can safely explore refugee and other issues, if they wish	-organize ESL parent nights, facilitated and supported by trained and trusted interpreters/settlement workers -listen carefully to refugee parents to understand their children's issues and needs -make time for informal, personal contact between school and home to build trusting relationships; be willing to meet refugee families in homes and community settings -work with trained interpreters and translators to link with non-English speaking families on formal home/school issues -create multilingual pool of parents to be "information buddies" for non-English speaking parents --locate and work through organized ethnocultural groups or trusted community members to link with "hard-to-reach" refugee families -actively recruit and support the involvement of refugee parents for School Council	-ensure that clear policies and procedures are in place that articulate an anti-racist stance and provide guidelines for staff and others about how to respond to all forms of racism -ensure that school communities are familiar with these and are used by all members, including students, staff, parents -ensure that existing policies, standards, and practices do not unwittingly work against refugee students (eg. rigid enforcement of "zero tolerance of violence" policies with refugee children without considering the backgrounds from which they have come) -work towards recruiting staff and volunteers to reflect increasing diversity within schools -act immediately and firmly to deal with all expressions of racism; strong leadership from principals, vice-principals, and other authority figures is key; an educational approach promoting caring, compassion, and information has been found to be effective in most instances	-work with ethnocultural associations and others to ensure that refugee families are aware of their rights and responsibilities and how to work with the system to ensure their children's needs are met -work with refugee parents to support participation on local school councils and school boards; ensure their perspective and concerns are heard and addressed

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Values	caring & compassion	self-determination & participation	health & diversity	distributive justice
Creative Initiatives (continued)	-develop discussion/support groups for refugee children in which they can safely explore and express issues related to refugee and settlement experiences -provide recreational and social opportunities for refugee children to integrate with "mainstream" children) eg. cross-cultural befriending programs, international games nights, etc.) -identify and link with community resources beneficial to refugee children and families (eg. ethnocultural community leaders, refugee and settlement support groups, cultural interpreters, culturally sensitive and/or multilingual counsellors)	-ensure parents understand how important their participation is to their children's academic success and overall well-being at school, whether parents can speak English or not	-train teachers, guidance counsellors, and other school staff to be aware of and recognize behavioural and academic problems that may be rooted in children's refugee experiences -choose curriculum materials that reflect and respect diversity (novels, art projects and techniques, music, games, field trips, mathematical examples, etc.) -use traditional methods to acknowledge, educate for, and celebrate diversity (eg. school newsletters, assemblies, morning announcements, posters, welcome signs, etc.)	-form coalitions with community groups and individuals (eg. settlement agencies, counselling agencies, refugee support groups, refugee parents, ESL teachers, concerned parents, and citizens) to lobby politicians for resources to maintain and enhance school-based community supports for refugee children and families
Outcomes	-reduced risks related to settlement issues -increased capacity of refugee children to cope with stresses of refugeeism and settlement -increased supports for refugee children when they need them (eg. aware and responsive teachers and classmates, range of concrete supports such as support groups and counselling if needed) -more appropriate and accurate assessment and placement of refugee children -greater academic and social success of refugee children, both now and in the future	-improved home-school communication and relations -greater parental involvement in classroom and on School Council -improved understanding by school staff of refugee children's needs -greater parental awareness of school and community resources to support their children	-greater acceptance, understanding, and appreciation of all forms of diversity (eg. cultural, gender, economic, lifestyle, abilities, etc.) -increased racial harmony, fewer racist incidents -increased sense of safety, belonging, and community	-increased awareness of the needs of refugee children at all levels of system -increased resources to provide necessary supports -sense of empowerment for all involved, particularly refugee families

Why Do People Become Involved?

My first research question related to people's motivation to become involved in this work. I learned that lived experience and shared values were what drew and kept people together in response to the support needs of refugee children and their families. Principles that emerged from these shared values guided the work and kept participants true to themselves, each other, and their common goal, in spite of some very diverse experiences and beliefs. Being involved in the research process strengthened the work of the CSG, since members were provided with an opportunity to name and discuss values and principles which, until that point, had been largely implicit. Living by these values and principles both within the group and in the community was given high priority by CSG members.

What Resources Are Needed?

My second research question sought to reveal the resources needed to develop supports for refugee children. Human resources, and particularly ESL teachers, emerged as most essential in this process. Another key but less mentioned human resource was the rich knowledge and experience of refugee children, parents, and communities. Several newcomers who participated in the CSG were highly trained teachers, social workers and mental health professionals. Some had provided support for other refugees in their own countries and in refugee camps. However, their foreign credentials were and are not currently recognized or valued by Canadian institutions. At the same time, Canadian-born professionals do not have the training or experience to provide appropriate counselling and support for refugees. The CSG tried, not always successfully, to reach out to and

build on the capacity of newcomer members. Pooling the resources of both mainstream and refugee groups in community-based initiatives seemed the best way of responding to the support needs of increasing numbers of refugee children in our midst.

How Does One Develop Supports For Refugee Children?

My third research question explored the processes, partnerships, and dynamics involved in developing supports. Community-building emerged as the fundamental process required and was integrally linked to refugee children's need to belong in order to feel safe. Schools were named as the pivotal starting point around which to start the community-building process. They were recognized as the main point of contact for refugee children and a setting from within which to promote competence, foster respect for diversity, and buffer the negative experiences of such children. Successful community-building started with finding new ways of reaching out to refugee families in order to develop trusting relationships and increase the voice and participation of refugee children and parents in schools. Education, particularly anti-racist education, was identified as the key to creating safe and equitable relationships at both an individual and a systemic level in the school and the broader community. Advocacy was required to protect essential resources, such as ESL teachers and programs, and to lobby for more equitable access to resources and decision-making power for refugee children and parents.

How Can This Work Be Sustained?

My final research question focused on what needed to be done to sustain the work in the long term. Throughout the research, participants emphasized the importance of thinking creatively, challenging assumptions, fostering grass-roots participation and

empowerment, building partnerships at multiple levels to access resources and power, and working for systemic change. They also pointed out that documenting outcomes and the ways in which these were achieved was an increasingly important step in obtaining necessary resources.

Lessons Learned

A number of lessons learned from this research may be helpful to others interested in engaging in similar work. They are as follows:

1. Start by identifying common values and from these derive principles that will guide the work. Identifying common values and deriving from them guiding principles is an essential starting point for any kind of community-based work, especially when working with people from diverse backgrounds.

2. Invest time in building relationships based on trust and mutual respect. The value of caring and compassion is the common starting point in this process. A basic ingredient is two-way communication based on non-judgemental listening and mutual learning.

3. Form diverse partnerships with people and groups at all different levels of the system. Partnerships are a way of accessing essential human and other resources. They provide opportunities for mutual education and support in different settings. Many voices raised together ensure the greater impact of education and advocacy and an increased likelihood that systemic change will be achieved and sustained.

4. Choose schools as the starting point from which to build community supports. Schools are a pivotal point around which to start a community-building process for refugee children. They are the main point of contact for refugee children and a setting from within

which to promote competence, foster respect for diversity, and buffer the negative experiences of such children.

5. Use a community development approach to reach out to people where they are and to work on issues that they identify. Outreach methods and ways of working must be adapted to increase inclusion and grass-roots participation. Approaches that build on individual strengths and community capacity are more engaging and empowering than providing deficit-based "supports."

6. Use a universal approach dedicated to building equity, safety, and a sense of belonging for all. Refugee children and their parents do not want to be stigmatized or marginalized by being singled out, even for help. The same barriers that refugee children face are experienced by all groups that are seen to be "different." A universal approach provides a "safety net" for refugee children whose needs may not be stated or apparent, and contributes to the equity, safety, and sense of belonging of all.

7. Challenge assumptions and work for systemic change. Change can only happen when people are ready to believe that things should and can be different from the status quo. There is a need for people to free themselves from "mental slavery" and to see new ways of using resources and supporting learning that meets the needs of children rather than the needs of the system. The sustainability of individual interventions is dependent on larger systemic changes.

8. Document and evaluate the work. Documentation provides a record of what has been done, how it has been done, and what works and doesn't work. Evaluation measures what has been accomplished and can be used to justify the need for resources. Both are

essential to groups sharing with others what they have done and being able to sustain the work over the long term.

9. Celebrate! Working for long term change, especially in a challenging social and economic climate, can easily lead to discouragement and burnout. Making time to celebrate together is essential for revitalizing the group.

Closing Comments

I would like to conclude by reflecting on the broad theme: building school-based community supports for refugee children. I found that the rationale for basing child-focused prevention work in schools was thoroughly discussed in the literature; however, the concept of building "community supports" for refugee children was an idea that I encountered nowhere else except in the work on which this thesis was based. Refugee children, families, and communities experience what one refugee member of the CSG referred to as "collective trauma." He explained that this form of trauma is different from individual trauma since it annihilates not only each individual's sense of safety but the social norms and values on which an entire group of people based their way of thinking and behaving. I believe this is why I found belonging and rebuilding a sense of community for refugee children so essential to their well-being: collective trauma demands a collective community response.

As our communities continue to become home to growing numbers of people who have experienced war and collective trauma, we are discovering that our specialized mental health resources are not appropriate nor sufficient to meet their needs. In fact, the needs of refugee children are only now even being recognized. Further research is

required to define and describe the concept and impact of collective trauma and to document effective responses. Specific prevention programs may be helpful but they are not sufficient. Broader supports and more fundamental changes in attitudes and systemic practices are needed to ensure that refugee children, and others who are different, become part of the "mainstream". It is my hope that this thesis may contribute in some way to the knowledge of planning and developing community responses for refugee children.

POSTSCRIPT

A year has passed since I collected the data for my thesis. In response to interest expressed by my thesis committee members, and for other readers who may want an up-date on the Greenvale experience, I have prepared this postscript. Given the very special contribution that ESL teachers make to building community supports for refugee children, I thought it fitting that it be presented in the words of one of the ESL teachers who participated in the research.

> "As an ESL teacher, I have felt the stress this year of the past several years of upheaval in the schools: the teachers' protest of Bill 160 in the fall of 1997; the teachers' strike in the fall of 1998; the many cuts in education; and the pending cuts to ESL in this board. There will almost definitely be at least at 25% reduction in ESL in September. I still don't know what my own teaching assignment will be next year. I look at students in my class and see some of them just starting to get comfortable in English. I know the limited time they now have to learn English [three years according to the new funding formula], and the cuts to ESL that are coming next fall, and I worry about how they will be able to cope. We have just done our assessment of how many students will need ESL/ESD [English Skills Development] next year. There are 126 students in our school who will need these supports, but the board will receive provincial funding for very few of them.
>
> Still, with all these stresses, I see many signs that our school is a good place for newcomer kids to be. The office continues to deal firmly with racist incidents. Children still report that there is little or no racist teasing on the playground, which is different from their experience of some other schools. Newcomer students were

successful in obtaining a prayer room for those who want to say daily prayers. We have families from both sides of the current conflict in the former Yugoslavia in our school; we have been watching, and so far there have been no problems between them. One classroom teacher organized a collection of supplies for Kosovo, in response to an Albanian parent's request, and the school community's generosity was quite overwhelming. There are still problems, but I believe we have gone well beyond multiculturalism to create an atmosphere of real acceptance of diversity.

Oh, and something wonderful happened in our school this year! We have an artist that lives in the neighbourhood. She called the principal one day to tell her that she loves to watch the children go past her window in the morning on their way to Greenvale school: the different colours and styles of dress; the ethnocultural diversity of the children; and the way they seem to get along. So she painted it! And this painting, I think it's called 'Going to and from Greenvale School', is hanging in a Kitchener art gallery. And she came to our school during Reading Week to speak to the children and read to them, and she left us a photograph of her painting."

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APPENDIX 1
Information Letter for Community Support Group Research Participants

January, 1998

Dear

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study entitles "Planning and Developing School-based Community Supports for Refugee Children." As you know, I am Coordinator of the Multicultural Health Promotion Project. As part of my work, I have been involved with a community coalition called the Survivors of Torture and Trauma Working Group. I am also a Masters of Community Psychology student at Wilfrid Laurier University. I have chosen to do my thesis in the area of prevention programming for refugee children. This research will provide the basis for my thesis, as well as build on my work with the community.

The purpose of my thesis is to examine the process of planning and developing school-based community supports that promote the well-being of refugee children. To do this, I plan to investigate and document the experience of school communities and of the Community Support Group. This is a sub-group of the Survivors of Torture and Trauma Working Group. Group members have been working to develop supports for children survivors of war and trauma. It is my hope that his study will contribute to the successful implementation of this work, generate ideas for how to establish similar supports for refugee children, and add to the understanding of how to plan and develop prevention programs in general.

My research methods include journalling the Community Support Group's process of developing supports, conducting focus groups with the Community Support Group members, and doing interviews with key informants. Attached you will find consent forms that specifically describe the way in which I hope you will be involved. Also included are copies of questions that I will ask if you agree to participate. Focus group interviews will last no more than one and a half hours. I will conduct these myself and will request your permission to tape record our discussion to ensure the information I collect is as complete and accurate as possible. All research records will be kept confidential and any names or identifying characteristics will be removed from the thesis. I will not use any quotations without verifying them with you and obtaining your consent. My research proposal has undergone an ethics review at the university. If you have any questions or concerns, please call me (883-2110 ext. 5339) or my supervisor, Geoff Nelson (884-0710 ext. 3314).

I will contact you within the next two weeks to discuss your participation in this study and to answer any questions. I look forward to speaking with you and appreciate your support.

Sincerely yours,

APPENDIX 2
Consent Form for Community Support Group Participants

January, 1998

Researcher: Peggy Nickels
Masters of Community Psychology Student
Wilfrid Laurier University

Supervisor: Dr. Geoff Nelson
Community Psychology Program
Wilfrid Laurier University

I have been informed of the purpose and methods of the study "Planning and Developing School-based Community Supports for Refugee Children." I understand what will be required of me if I agree to participate. Furthermore I understand that:

-I have been asked to allow the researcher to document the work of the Community Support Group, of which I am a member, and that she will be recording the process of our work in her research journal;
-I have also been asked to participate in two focus groups, each of which will last approximately one and a half hours;
-my participation is entirely voluntary;
-I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, and to not answer any questions that I do not wish to answer, with no negative repercussions from the researcher;
-there are no known risks involved in my participation and I am free to contact the researcher or her supervisor if I have any questions or concerns;
-my research records will be kept confidential and I will not be identified in any way in published material or discussions;
-any audiotapes of focus groups will be heard only by the researcher and will be erased upon completion of the research;
-no quotations will be used without my consent;
-I will be provided with a summary report of the research by December 1 1998, at the latest.
-the information that I and others provide will be used to help develop school-based community support programs for refugee children.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 3
Interview Guide for Focus Group 1

January, 1998

1. What motivated you to become involved in building school-based community supports for refugee children?

2. On what values and principles do you think this work should be based?

3. What kinds of resources, both human and material, are needed to develop school-based supports for refugee children?
   - What resources already exist within schools and what resources need to be obtained elsewhere?
   - What resources can refugee children and families bring?
   - What resources can community groups contribute?

4. What processes, partnerships, and dynamics are involved and what is their impact?
   - What are the forces for and against such a process?
   - What are the benefits and risks for the various groups?
   - What are some unanticipated results?
   - What is and what should be the nature of the partnerships and relationships?

5. What concrete positive changes are anticipated?

6. How can they be documented or measured?

7. What has to happen for the process to continue over the long term?
   - What factors may enhance or undermine the process's sustainability?
   - How can positive factors be enhanced and negative factors be overcome?

APPENDIX 4
Interview Guide for Focus Group 2

June, 1998

1. In the past few months, I have collected information from you and from key informants about planning and developing school-based community supports for refugee children. Based on a content analysis of these qualitative data, my preliminary findings are: (these were shared with the focus group). Do you agree or disagree with these findings? What insights can be drawn from them?

APPENDIX 5

Information Letter for Key Informant Participants Greenvale School
(Greenvale is a fictitious name used to maintain confidentiality)

March, 1998

Dear

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study entitled "Planning and Developing a School-based Community Supports for Refugee Children". I am Coordinator of the Multicultural Health Promotion Project and as part of my work I have been involved with a community coalition known as the Survivors of Torture and Trauma Working Group (STTWG)for the past three years. I am also a Masters of Community Psychology student at Wilfrid Laurier University. I have chosen to do my thesis in the area of prevention programming for refugee children. This research will provide the basis for my thesis as well as build on my work with the community.

The purpose of my thesis is to examine the process of planning and developing school-based community supports that promote the well-being of refugee children. To do this, I plan to investigate and document the experience of school communities and the STTWG as they work to initiate supports for children survivors of war and refugeeism. It is my hope that this study will contribute to the successful implementation of this work, generate ideas for how to establish similar programs for refugee children, and add to the understanding of how to plan and develop prevention programs in general.

My research methods include conducting key informant interviews with school community members in ESL schools. Greenvale School is one of the schools I have chosen because of the work it has done in trying to reach out to ESL families and children. Attached you will find consent forms that specifically describe the way in which I hope you will be involved. Also included is an Interview Guide that I will use if you agree to participate. Please do not feel that you need to come to the interview with answers to all these questions; my purpose in showing them to you is to give you an idea of what I hope to learn from speaking to different members of Greenvale School.

My interview with you will last approximately 45 minutes. I will conduct the interviews myself and will request your permission to tape record our discussion to ensure that the information I collect is as complete and accurate as possible. All research records will be kept confidential. Any names or identifying characteristics will be removed from the thesis. I will not use any quotations without verifying them with you and obtaining your consent. My research proposal has undergone an ethics review at the university. If you have any questions or concerns, please call me (883-2110 ext. 5339) or my supervisor, Geoff Nelson (884-0710 ext. 3314).

I will contact you within the next two weeks to discuss your potential participation in this study, to answer any questions you may have, and to arrange a convenient time and place at which to meet. I look forward to speaking with you and appreciate your consideration of this invitation.

Sincerely yours,

Peggy Nickels
11 Dill Street
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 1L2

APPENDIX 6

Consent Form for Key Informant Interview Participants at Greenvale School
(Greenvale is a fictitious name used to maintain confidentiality)

March, 1998

Researcher: Peggy Nickels
Masters of Community Psychology Student
Wilfrid Laurier University

Supervisor: Dr. Geoff Nelson
Community Psychology Program
Wilfrid Laurier University

I have been informed of the purpose and methods of the above-named study and what will be requested of me if I agree to participate. Furthermore I understand that:

-I have been asked to participate in an interview which will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes;
-my participation is entirely voluntary;
-I am free to withdraw my participation at any time, and to not answer any questions that I do not wish to answer, with no negative consequences;
-there are no known risks involved in my participation and I am free to contact the researcher or her supervisor if I have any questions or concerns;
-my research records will be kept confidential and I will not be identified in any way in published material or discussions;
-any audiotapes of interviews will be heard only by the researcher and will be erased upon completion of the research;
-no quotations will be used without my consent;
-I will be provided with a summary report of the research by December 1, 1998 at the latest;
-the information that I provide will be used to help develop school-based community supports for refugee children.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 7

Interview Guide for Greenvale School Key Informants
(Greenvale is a fictitious name used to maintain confidentiality)

March, 1998

(Depending on the respondent's involvement with ESL and refugee children at Greenvale School, some of the questions were omitted or rephrased. Indented questions were used as probes when necessary.)

1. Why did you (or others in your school) become involved in working to strengthen the relationship between the school and ESL families?

2. What do you think have been the most important values and principles that have contributed to this process? Are there any values or principles that should have been incorporated but were not?

3. What human and material resources have been needed in undertaking this initiative?
    - What resources already existed within the school and what resources had to be sought elsewhere?
    - What resources have ESL families and their children contributed?
    - What resources have community groups contributed?
    - What other support is needed and how might it be obtained?

4. What processes, partnerships, and dynamics have been involved in this initiative and what has been their impact?
    - What have been the forces working for and against your/others' involvement in the process?
    - What have been the risks and benefits for you/others?
    - Have there been any unanticipated results, and if so, what are they?
    - What has been and what should be the nature of the partnerships and relationships of those involved?

5. What positive changes were hoped for and what ones have you seen? How can these be documented and measured?

6. What has to happen for this initiative to continue and improve over the long term?
    - What external and internal factors may enhance or undermine the initiative's sustainability?
    - How can positive factors be enhanced and negative factors be overcome?
    - Do you see yourself being involved in the future? If so, how?

APPENDIX 8
Follow-up Letter to All Research Participants

November, 1998

Dear

I am asking for your help with my thesis one more time. Enclosed pleased find a draft of the Results section which represents the main findings of my research. I have used many direct quotes, which is typical of qualitative research. Your quotes are highlighted. I would like you to read them and make sure they are accurate and appropriately used. In many cases I have shortened them in an effort to keep the thesis to a readable length. This was not easy to do since everyone had such valuable comments to make! However I tried to make sure I didn't change the point you were making.

If you have any comments or concerns about the way I have used your words, please contact me by phone (home: 576-7376; work: 745-4404) or E-mail (nick1237@mach1.wlu.ca). If I don't hear from you by December 20, I will assume that I may use these quotes as they are.

I realize that I promised to send you a summary of my research by December 1, 1998. As you can see, I am behind schedule! I set an ambitious deadline and haven't been able to meet it. I now plan to finish in the Spring of 1999, which I believe is realistic. I look forward to sending you the summary at that time.

Thank you again for your time and contribution to my research. I have learned so much from you, including many things I was not able to include in the thesis.

Sincerely yours,

Peggy Nickels, Masters Student
Community Psychology Program, Wilfrid Laurier University

copy to: Dr. Geoff Nelson, Thesis advisor
Mr. Paul Davock, Field Supervisor

APPENDIX 9
Summary of the Research for Participants

April 30, 1999

Dear

As promised, I am sending you a summary of the findings of my thesis, "Planning and Developing School-based Community Supports for Refugee Children." I appreciate the time you took to read over the draft of the results section, which I sent to you last November, and made changes according to your suggestions.

I would like to thank all of you most sincerely for your participation in the key informant interviews and focus groups. Your insightful comments are the heart and soul of my thesis. I hope I captured and presented them in a way that reflects the collective wisdom of all those involved. My favourite part of doing this thesis was listening to and learning from you. Please feel free to call me at any time to share questions or ideas you may have related to my research or the on-going community work of responding to the needs of refugee children.

Sincerely yours,

Peggy Nickels

Planning and Developing School-based Community Supports for Refugee Children
Summary and Lessons Learned
April, 1999

In spite of the growing numbers of refugee families seeking to start a new life in Canada, there is little or no documentation of how to support this process, particularly for children (Seskar-Hencic, 1996). The purpose of my thesis was to examine the process of planning and developing school-based community supports that promote the well-being of refugee children. To do this I investigated and documented the experience of the Equity Action Schools Coalition and the Community Support Group (CSG) (a sub-committee of the Survivors of Torture and Trauma Working Group) in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. I used qualitative methods to collect and analyze data from three focus groups, seven key informant interviews, a document review, and a research journal.

In order to capture and present the findings in a more usable way, I summarized them in the following Table. I linked the values to what I saw as the four key components of the work. To illustrate how these components were translated into action, I listed some of the many creative initiatives described by my research participants. Finally, I identified some of the associated outcomes named in the literature and in my research.

Summary Table

Main Components	**Support** for refugee children	**Outreach and Community Building** with refugee families	**Education** for school and larger community	**Advocacy** to change the system
Values	caring & compassion	self-determination & participation	health & diversity	distributive justice
Objectives	-to minimize risk factors in refugee children's new environment -to maximize protective factors in their new environment -to support and build on their natural resilience -to enhance or introduce new coping skills	-to improve communication between school and refugee families -to increase refugee parents' involvement in children's school life for the overall well-being of children -to increase refugee parents' awareness and understanding of how the school system works and how to make it work for them	-to increase awareness and ability/willingness to respond appropriately to all individual and systemic forms of racism within school, school system, and community at large -to increase appreciation and acceptance of diversity among students, teachers, parents, and school community as a whole	-to gain access to resources needed to achieve other objectives -to address larger social change issues (eg. racism in school system and community; cuts to education and social programs that affect refugee children and families)
Initiatives	-minimize risk of revictimizing refugee children by working to eliminate racist incidents, and racism within school community (see "education") -minimize risk of stigmatizing refugee children by using universal strategy of valuing all forms of diversity -maintain adequate level of ESL programming, since ESL teachers are pivotal in providing support to refugee children and linking with families and community -support opportunities for refugee children to maintain cultural identity by actively accommodating diversity (eg. provide alternative room at lunch time for those who are fasting) -develop in-school supports for new refugee children (eg. "first language buddies") -provide supportive settings in which children know they can safely explore refugee and other issues	-organize ESL parent nights, facilitated and supported by trained and trusted interpreters/settlement workers -listen carefully to refugee parents to understand what are their children's issues and needs -make time for informal, personal contact between school and home to build trusting relationships; be willing to meet refugee families in homes and community settings -work with trained interpreters and translators to link with non-English speaking families on formal home/school issues -create multilingual pool of parents to be "information buddies" for non-English speaking parents --locate and work through organized ethnocultural groups or trusted community members to link with "hard-to-reach" refugee families -actively recruit and support the involvement of refugee parents for School Council	-ensure that clear policies and procedures are in place that articulate an anti-racist stance and provide guidelines for staff and others about how to respond to all forms of racism -ensure that school communities are familiar with these and are used by all members, including students, staff, parents -ensure that existing policies, standards, and practices do not unwittingly work against refugee students (eg. rigid enforcement of "zero tolerance of violence" policies with refugee children without considering the backgrounds from which they have come) -work towards recruiting staff and volunteers to reflect increasing diversity within schools -act immediately and firmly to deal with all expressions of racism; strong leadership from principals, vice-principals, and other authority figures is key; an educational approach promoting caring, compassion, and information has been found to be effective in most instances	-work with ethnocultural associations and others to ensure that refugee families are aware of their rights and responsibilities and how to work with the system to ensure their children's needs are met-work with refugee parents to support participation on local school -councils and school boards; ensure their perspective and concerns are heard and addressed

Main Components	**Support** for refugee children	**Outreach and Community Building** with refugee families	**Education** for school and larger community	**Advocacy** to change the system
Values	caring & compassion	self-determination & participation	health & diversity	distributive justice
Initiatives (continued)	-develop discussion/support groups for refugee children in which they can safely explore and express issues related to refugee and settlement experiences -provide recreational and social opportunities for refugee children to integrate with "mainstream" children) eg. cross-cultural befriending programs, international games nights, etc.) -identify and link with community resources beneficial to refugee children and families (eg. ethnocultural community leaders, refugee and settlement support groups, cultural interpreters, culturally sensitive and/or multilingual counsellors)	-ensure parents understand how important their participation is to their children's academic success and overall well-being at school, whether parents can speak English or not	-train teachers, guidance counsellors, and other school staff to be aware of and recognize behavioural and academic problems that may be rooted in children's refugee experiences -choose curriculum materials that reflect and respect diversity (novels, art projects and techniques, music, games, field trips, mathematical examples, etc.) -use traditional methods to acknowledge, educate for, and celebrate diversity (eg. school newsletters, assemblies, morning announcements, posters, welcome signs, etc.)	-form coalitions with community groups and individuals (eg. settlement agencies, counselling agencies, refugee support groups, refugee parents, ESL teachers, concerned parents, and citizens) to lobby politicians for resources to maintain and enhance school-based community supports for refugee children and families
Outcomes	-reduced risks related to settlement issues -increased capacity of refugee children to cope with stresses of refugeeism and settlement -increased supports for refugee children when they need them (eg. aware and responsive teachers and classmates, range of concrete supports such as support groups and counselling if needed) -more appropriate and accurate assessment and placement of refugee children -greater academic and social success of refugee children, both now and in the future	-improved home-school communication and relations -greater parental involvement in classroom and on School Council -improved understanding by school staff of refugee children's needs -greater parental awareness of school and community resources to support their children	-greater acceptance, understanding, and appreciation of all forms of diversity (eg. cultural, gender, economic, lifestyle, abilities, etc.) -increased racial harmony, fewer racist incidents -increased sense of safety, belonging, and community	-increased awareness of the needs of refugee children at all levels of system-increased resources to provide necessary supports-sense of empowerment for all involved, particularly refugee families

Why Do People Become Involved?

My first research question related to people's motivation to become involved in this work. I learned that lived experience and shared values were what drew and kept people together in response to the support needs of refugee children and their families. Principles that emerged from these shared values guided the work and kept participants true to themselves, each other, and their common goal, in spite of some very diverse experiences and beliefs. Being involved in the research process strengthened the work of the CSG, since members were provided with an opportunity to name and discuss values and principles which until that point had been largely implicit. Living by these values and principles both within the group and in the community was given high priority by CSG members.

What Resources Are Needed?

My second research question sought to reveal the resources needed to develop supports for refugee children. Human resources, and particularly ESL teachers, emerged as most essential in this process. Another key but less mentioned human resource was the rich knowledge and experience of refugee children, parents, and communities. Several newcomers who participated in the CSG were highly trained teachers, social workers and mental health professionals. Some had provided support for other refugees in their own countries and in refugee camps. However, their foreign credentials were and are not currently recognized or valued by Canadian institutions. At the same time, Canadian-born professionals do not have the training or experience to provide appropriate counselling and support for refugees. The CSG tried, not always successfully, to reach out to and build on the capacity of newcomer members. Pooling the resources of both mainstream and refugee groups in community-based initiatives seemed the best way of responding to the support needs of increasing numbers of refugee children in our midst.

How Does One Develop Supports For Refugee Children?

My third research question explored the processes, partnerships, and dynamics involved in developing supports. Community-building emerged as the fundamental process required and was integrally linked to refugee children's need to belong in order to feel safe. Schools were named as the pivotal starting point around which to start the community-building process. They were recognized as the main point of contact for refugee children and a setting from within which to promote competence, foster respect for diversity, and buffer the negative experiences of such children. Successful community-building started with finding new ways of reaching out to refugee families in order to develop trusting relationships and increase the voice and participation of refugee children and parents in schools. Education, particularly anti-racist education, was identified as the key to creating safe and equitable relationships at both an individual and a systemic level in the school and the broader community. Advocacy was required to protect essential

resources, such as ESL teachers and programs, and to lobby for more equitable access to resources and decision-making power for refugee children and parents.

How Can This Work Be Sustained?

My final research question focused on what needed to be done to sustain the work in the long term. Throughout the research, participants emphasized the importance of creative thinking that challenges assumption, fostering grass-roots participation and empowerment, building partnerships at multiple levels to access resources and power, and working for systemic change. They also pointed out that documenting outcomes and the ways in which these were achieved was an increasingly important step in obtaining necessary resources.

Lessons Learned

Key lessons learned can be summarized as follows:

1. Start by identifying common values and from these derive principles that will guide the work. Identifying common values and deriving from them guiding principles is an essential starting point for any kind of community-based work, especially when working with people from diverse backgrounds.

2. Invest time in building relationships based on trust and mutual respect. The value of caring and compassion is the common starting point in this process. A basic ingredient is two-way communication based on non-judgemental listening and mutual learning.

3. Form diverse partnerships with people and groups at all different levels of the system. Partnerships are a way of accessing essential human and other resources. They provide opportunities for mutual education and support in different settings. Many voices raised together ensure a greater impact of education and advocacy and an increased likelihood that systemic change will be achieved and sustained.

4. Choose schools as the starting point from which to build community supports. Schools are a pivotal point around which to start a community-building process for refugee children. They are the main point of contact for refugee children and a setting from within which to promote competence, foster respect for diversity, and buffer the negative experiences of such children.

5. Use a community development approach to reach out to people where they are and to work on issues that they identify. Outreach methods and ways of working must be adapted to increase inclusion and grass-roots participation. Approaches that build on individual strengths and community capacity are more engaging and empowering than providing deficit-base "supports."

6. Use a universal approach dedicated to building equity, safety, and a sense of belonging for all. Refugee children and their parents do not want to be stigmatized or marginalized by being singled out, even for help. The same barriers that refugee children face are experienced by all groups that are seen to be "different." A universal approach provides a "safety net" for refugee children whose needs may not be stated or apparent, and contributes to the equity, safety, and sense of belonging of all.

7. Challenge assumptions and work for systemic change. Change can only happen when people are ready to believe that things should and can be different from the status quo. There is a need for people to free themselves from "mental slavery" and to see new ways of using resources and supporting learning that meets the needs of children rather than the needs of the system. The sustainability of individual interventions is dependent on larger systemic changes.

8. Document and evaluate the work. Documentation provides a record of what has been done, how it has been done, and what works and doesn't work. Evaluation measures what has been accomplished and can be used to justify the need for further resources. Both are essential to groups sharing with others what they have done and being able to sustain the work over the long term.

9. Celebrate! Working for long term change, especially in a challenging social and economic climate, can easily lead to discouragement and burnout. Making time to celebrate together is essential for revitalizing the group.

Closing Comments

I would like to conclude by reflecting on the broad theme: building school-based community supports for refugee children. I found that the rationale for basing child-focused prevention work in schools was thoroughly discussed in the literature; however, the concept of building "community supports" for refugee children was an idea that I encountered nowhere else except in the work on which this thesis was based. Refugee children, families, and communities experience what one refugee member of the CSG referred to as "collective trauma." He explained that this form of trauma is different from individual trauma since it annihilates not only each individual's sense of safety but the social norms and values on which an entire group of people based their way of thinking and behaving. I believe this is why I found belonging and rebuilding a sense of community for refugee children so essential to their well-being: collective trauma demands a collective community response.

As our community continues to become home to growing numbers of people who have experienced war and collective trauma, we are discovering that our specialized mental health resources are not appropriate nor sufficient to meet their needs. In fact, the needs of refugee children are only now even being recognized. Further research is required to define and describe the concept and impact of collective trauma and to

document effective responses. Specific prevention programs may be helpful but they are not sufficient. Broader supports and more fundamental changes in attitudes and systemic practices are needed to ensure that refugee children, and others who are different, become part of the "mainstream". It is my hope that my research may contribute in some way to the knowledge of planning and developing community responses for refugee children.